

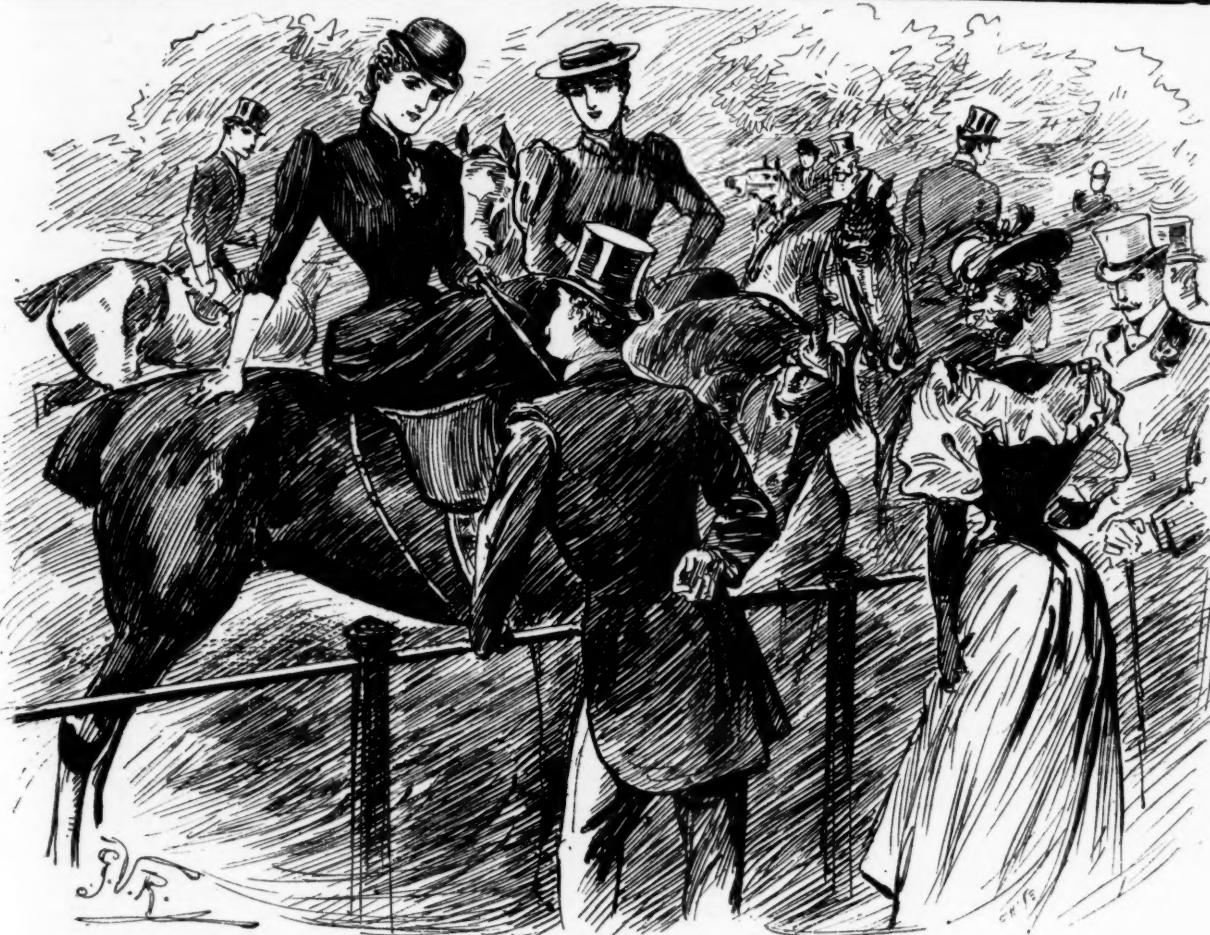
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



RUDOLPH DISCUSSES WITH THE MISTRESSES DAWSON THE KETTLEDRUM PARAGRAPH RELATING TO THEMSELVES.

LOVE IN A MAZE.

—:0:—

"THE jangled chords that mar the tune,
The mad desires, the hopes that die;
The tragedies that underlie
The laughter of a London June."

LORD HOUGHTON.

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CHAPTER I.

LOOKING FORWARD.

"AND he met them, you say, on board the *Marie Louise*, and lunched with them afterwards at the Imperial a few months ago, when they were coming home to England?"

"Yes. That was the beginning of it—when they were coming over from Santa Rosa Island."

"But they were wandering about the Continent, were they not—I heard so—before they made up their minds to come and settle in England? They were wandering about together—here, there, and everywhere—for some considerable time, I heard."

"I believe you're right. At least Rudolf De Vere says the same thing; and Rudolf De Vere

naturally knows more about them than anybody else in London; not, I fancy, between you and me, that he knows so very much, after all! Rudolf himself, it seems, was travelling homeward from Paris when he happened to come across them on board the *Marie Louise*."

"They certainly ride well—the pair of them—the aunt as well as the niece. I wonder who taught them to sit the saddle like that?"

"The natives possibly, the aborigines of Santa Rosa Island," said the other speaker with a broad smile, and she shifted her sunshade from one hand to the other—a dancing sunbeam was too inquisitive and was laughing at the rice-powder.

"But where on earth is Santa Rosa?"

"Somewhere in the North Pacific Ocean or the China Seas—somewhere or other in the neighbourhood of the Philippine Islands, or the Caroline Islands, or the Loo Choo Islands. I'm sure I forget which. At all events Rudolf De Vere says so—I don't know or even pretend to."

"Humph! that is rather vague and sketchy, is it not? Is the Island of Santa Rosa marked on the map, I wonder?"

"I've looked, but I can't find it; though I dare say it is all right. Anyway, at present they go everywhere and are received everywhere as you know yourself, the Duchess of Dumbolton presented them at the last drawing-room, and I should imagine they are likely to prove the sensation of the season—if indeed that isn't the case already. Someone was telling me they were with the Duchess at Ascot. I didn't see them there however. Of course, it is all entirely owing to Rudolph De Vere. Ha, ha!"

"They say that the aunt herself is in every way as charming as the niece—that at Cornwall House the other evening, she, the old Miss Dawson, did not sit out a single dance. Wonderful that for an old woman!"

"Oh, it is true enough, I've not the least doubt in the world," was the reply; "for everyone says the same thing. But then, Miss Elizabeth Dawson, after all, cannot be so very old though, of course, she must be something considerably over forty, to put the figure at the lowest. Just look at her now—the back of her! Slim as a girl! Really, one can hardly tell which of them is the aunt and which the niece. Honestly now can one?"



"Humph; in form perhaps they are remarkably alike——"

"And in feature too," interrupted the other, "when you come to look at them closely. Only the old Miss Dawson, if one may call her so, has little iron-gray curls all over her head, or, at any rate, nearly all over it; and the young Miss Dawson wears golden-brown ones in the same becoming and distractingly pretty fashion—so say the men. Ha, ha! Santa Rosa Island cannot surely be such a very barbarous place, can it, to send us over women of the pattern of this old Miss Dawson and her niece?"

"They do look thorough-bred, certainly," agreed the first speaker, thoughtfully, perhaps a trifle grudgingly.

"Well, scarcely that—nor can one pronounce them exactly aborigines." A new voice here put in, "Seen this week's *Kettledrum*?"

The two lady chatters, sitting at their ease in the June sunshine, under the still fresh and beautiful leafage of the Park trees, started simultaneously and looked up.

A stout and smiling elderly gentleman had ambled up and joined them; and now, standing there before the two ladies as he leaned with both arms upon his stick, Major Braeme was asking them whether they had yet seen the current number of the *Kettledrum*. The *Kettledrum* was the first and the smartest of all the society-journals; and society supported it unfailingly.

"How you startled us, Major! We thought you were out of town," said she whose heavy, good-humoured countenance was almost as unblushing as a pantomime clown's. There was no deception in the matter; the fact was self-evident—self-assertive.

"I came back yesterday. Country looking lovely," Major Braeme explained. "No chair to be had just here, I suppose?"

He glanced rather ruefully about him as he spoke. The beautiful June afternoon was very warm; it was half-past five o'clock; and the westerly sun, now growing coppery, foretold a sultry evening.

"No; not just here, I am afraid," said the large good-humoured lady, smiling.

And then the Major, still leaning perforce upon his stick, learned that his basking friends had not yet seen the *Kettledrum* journal of that week. So he told them forthwith about the particular paragraph, that in fact was nearly an article, which all Pall Mall had read that afternoon.

"Ah, you get all the news firsthand at the clubs," said the amiable lady of the rice-powder, with something between a sigh and a chuckle.

"And who would ever have imagined that they are Westshire farm-folk!" then observed her companion, with a languid shrug.

"Were, my dear friend; not *are*," corrected the Major airily. "The *Kettledrum* says that Oliver Dawson, having been compelled by misfortune to part with every stick and stone he had in the world, left Westshire and the old country and went out to try his luck in far Santa Rosa some seventeen or eighteen years ago."

"Oh, pray go on!"

"He had married somewhat late in life, and was a widower at the time, it seems; and he took with him his two motherless daughters—who, by the way, must have been mere youngsters at the date of their departure—and his unmarried sister, Miss Elizabeth Dawson, to look after the children; the identical Miss Dawson whom we now see yonder with her niece chatting across the railing to Mr. Rudolf De Vere."

"Ard the Westshire yeoman then, it appears, made a fortune out in Santa Rosa!" remarked interrogatively the less buxom of the two ladies—she who kept her face severely as nature made it.

"A very comfortable fortune, by George!" replied Major Braeme, with unction. "Agriculture at home here in England—and no wonder, poor chap!—simply ruined this Oliver Dawson, who I believe was something of what they call a 'gentleman farmer' by-the-bye, with once a goodish bit of land of his own; guano and other indigenous manure—fish bones and seaweed together I fancy it was—abroad in Santa Rosa, by-and-by set him upon his legs again; in fact, made another man of Oliver Dawson."

"How interesting!" laughed the jolly dame of the rice-powder. "And then the poor man died—eh?"

"Yes. Having made his 'pile,'" nodded the Major, "in fishbones and guano, and having lost one of his daughters, the elder of the two, through sunstroke, Oliver Dawson himself then likewise departed this life, and left all his wealth behind him. But how he left it precisely, nobody, it seems, can find out; for both Miss Dawson and her niece are curiously 'close' on the subject, and one can't very well ask 'em for the truth right out, don't you know?"

"Humph, I suppose not," murmured the stout lady. And she sighed.

"However," continued the Major, "there are some wiser than the rest of us, who say that every penny of Oliver Dawson's fortune was left unconditionally to the aunt, his spinster sister. Others will tell us just as emphatically that the whole of it was left unconditionally to the niece, his youngest and surviving daughter, which surely is more likely? Then, again, I have had it on excellent authority that his substance was bequeathed in equal shares to both kind-women—something like two hundred and fifty thousand apiece. At any rate one hears everywhere that the elder Miss Dawson is the guardian and sole relative of the younger, and that the girl cannot marry without her aunt's approval and consent. Something of that sort beyond a doubt—so they are saying, don't you know?"

"But, Major," said the jolly dame with the large be-floured visage, who indeed was no less a personage than the Countess of Bearwarden—"there's Doctor's Commons, isn't there? If the will is lodged there, cannot anybody see it for a shilling? I am sure I have always understood so—eh?"

The Countess was thinking of her dear happy-go-lucky impetuous son, Viscount Lowater, who was for ever in debt and seldom out of mischief.

No one of course need remember the guano and the seaweed, and the fishbones unless they pleased. Were not they done with now and forgotten, left behind for good in the distant island of Santa Rosa?

"Ah, an excellent idea!" chimed in her companion eagerly; who in fact was no less a personage than Lady Winterbourne, of Winterbourne Chase, the sole joy and hope of whose maternal heart was named and known throughout London—gay and fashionable West-end London—as the Honourable Colin Cherpstone, an amiable, a foolish, and very idle young man, who had once upon a time entertained a really serious notion of marrying a handsome barmaid a dozen years older than himself, and queen of a Piccadilly restaurant. His friends for a while were dreadfully frightened, and Lady Winterbourne had wept piteously; but luckily the madness passed off by degrees, and his people breathed again.

Major Braeme laughed gently.

"I am sorry to cause you the least disappointment, my dear ladies," said he, standing bare-headed before them courteously, bald though he was, preparatory to trotting away farther on to seek other basking acquaintances beneath the shady trees—but, from what I can gather from one and the other, the will is over the sea in Santa Rosa Island; is still, for aught one really knows to the contrary, in the safe hands of the late Oliver Dawson's native man of business, a faithful coloured creature, says report, who is trusted absolutely and implicitly by Miss Dawson and her niece. Why, nearly half the Island is the property of those two lucky women—I mean of one of them, though Heaven knows which, or, it may be, of both. Who can tell, as matters stand now? So 'tis no wonder, perhaps, that Rudolf de Vere should stick to them, and loan, too, as if he meant to hold his ground."

"He got the start of everybody, you see, on board the Folkestone boat—everything is in his favour," said Lady Winterbourne, almost peevishly.

"Still he cannot marry them both, my dear, remember," said the Countess of Bearwarden, confidentially; "and—who knows; who can foresee?—he may fix upon the wrong one after all. Ha, ha!"

The genial little Major, who could not help

overhearing the countess's stage-aside, looked amused.

"I have not yet heard," said he, "that there is any talk or thought of marrying or of giving in marriage in that quarter; nor do I seriously believe that Rudolf De Vere is a marrying man. But time will show, of course."

"He found for them that lovely snug house of theirs in Park-lane, did he not?" said Lady Winterbourne, as the chatty little Major showed signs of edging off.

"Yes, he did. Quite right. *An re*—"

"And now he is on the look out for a place in the country for them," cried out the fat Countess of Bearwarden—"is that so, Major?"

"That is so—also correct. We shall meet to night, I dare say, at the duchess's. In the meantime, my dear friends, read your *Kettledrum*. It will tell you veraciously far more than I can remember at this moment about the rich Miss Dawson and her very charming niece. *Au revoir!*"

And this park-and-drawing-room acquaintance, a cheery old worldling and club-lounger who knew everybody's business much better than his own, bowed himself gradually away.

When Major Braeme was fairly gone, lost in the smart Park crowd, the Countess of Bearwarden said to her friend Lady Winterbourne,—

"Really I do not see why Rudolf De Vere should have everything *all* his own way. Do you?"

"No, I do not," answered Lady Winterbourne, briefly, with an answering and a meaning look straight into her companion's eyes.

And one of them was saying to herself,—

"I shall certainly speak to Lowater. It is time he was steady and settled."

And the other to herself murmured,—

"I shall decidedly speak to Colin. If he is not wise now, he never will be."

And both of them inwardly resolved to lose no time in the matter.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH THE ELDER MISS DAWSON IS SEEN IN A PRIVILEGED LIGHT.

RUDOLF DE VERE, himself not riding to-day, meanwhile remained leaning upon the railing of the Row, with the sun in his eyes and his hat tilted slightly over them, in desultory, pleasant talk with the two Misses Dawson.

Rudolf was very handsome; and he knew it, of course, albeit the knowledge had in nowise spoilt him. His bitterest foe would have been scouted—laughed at—had that enemy ventured to call him either an ugly or a vain man. Meeting him anywhere, men and women alike invariably looked at Rudolf twice; the latter often more than twice—incontestable evidence of the power and the magnetism of mere physical beauty.

His were those deep-set, dark-blue eyes which enthusiasts on the subject call "violet;" with straight, well-marked brows above them of a dusky tan. His mouth beneath the tan moustache was as red and as sweet-looking as a pretty woman's. His complexion bronzed health; his figure strength; though Rudolf de Vere now sauntered, as it were, through life, having taxed his muscles scarcely at all since his old athletic days at Cambridge.

He had troops of friends but no near kindred; delightful bachelor rooms in South Street; a glorious old mansion called Monkshood in the country. He had travelled far, had seen much, and he was sensible enough to comprehend to the full that his lines in life had fallen in extremely pleasant places. Indeed, Rudolf de Vere, even were it possible, would have exchanged his own lot for that of no man.

Rudolf, as the phrase goes, knew everybody; was to be met with everywhere, and, though perhaps he himself barely realized the fact, he had in some way or other grown to be regarded as "the fashion."

Not that his vanity was in the least touched by the circumstance, for he was too sweet-tempered, easy-going and unaffected, to be vain of a greatness which had, as it were, been thrust

upon him. He had never courted popularity—popularity somehow had come to him unsought.

Backed by so many advantages, personal and social, is it to be wondered at that Rudolf de Vere found it, occasionally, a by no means easy feat to step delicately and safely over the matrimonial gins which mothers with marriageable daughters, so indefatigably set for his destruction—as his friends called it.

But he had always, somehow, contrived to escape the alluring trap—the snare—the fowler's net, and at thirty-one, Rudolf was as heart-whole and fancy-free as he had been at twenty-one.

And so, Rudolf De Vere, in spite of himself was "the fashion." A careless word of praise or of admiration from him had metamorphosed a merely bright young woman into a professional beauty; had given a reputation and a banking account to an obscure and a mediocre actress; made the fortune of a novel; had saved a tottering play.

Since then, the Miss Dawsons had come over to Europe with the avowed intention of endeavouring to get into society—the right and the real society. Society with a big S. Nothing in the world more lucky could have befallen them, than that meeting with Rudolf De Vere on board the *Marie Louise*.

For them, that fortunate encounter was more than half the battle; their piquant, bright good looks, their air of breeding, their wealth, their vivacity and *chic* did the rest.

People said, indeed, that Rudolf had a talent for "discovering" just what was most acceptable to society. When a new author, or a new painter, or a new musician, or a new anybody else cropped up and took the town by storm, people went about saying directly,—"Of course Rudolf De Vere knows all about him (or her)," as the case might be. And it invariably proved, too, that Rudolf de Vere had had something to do with the success of the new celebrity.

He himself wrote a little, painted a little, sang and played a little—in fact, did everything that amuses society a little. If he had not been born a rich man he would have used his brains and become a famous one.

And so Rudolf, in his sunny-tempered, his kindly-natured way, took by the hand Miss Dawson and her niece; and the great world, upon his recommendation alone, for his sake solely at first, received them with open arms.

He had early found for them a charming little gem of a house in Park-lane, and had helped them to furnish it with all things beautiful. He bought for them their horses, saddle and other necessities; escorted them and introduced them to his own carriage-builder in Long Acre. In all such matters, indeed, the inexperienced ladies from Santa Rosa found that Rudolf De Vera was an authority worth listening to; and his taste, his knowledge, his counsel in every way, they confided, were invaluable.

And his delightfully practical and pleasant friendship, with its equally agreeable and inevitable consequences, might never have been formed—in all probability, as earthly affairs go, it never would or could have come to pass—but for that thrice-lucky meeting and self-introduction between them on board the *Marie Louise*.

And it was all the result of an accident—the merest commonplace little accident—which only once more demonstrates the fact that trifles often father great events.

It was in this wise that it happened.

There was a stiffish breeze blowing from the Boulogne coast they were fast leaving behind them, and it chanced that Elizabeth Dawson drew out her pocket-handkerchief. The sea-wind snatched it from her hand, and whirled it into the air.

"Oh, stop it!—save it, somebody!" cried her niece Susy, involuntarily. The young girl's name was really "Susan," she having been christened after her mother; but from earliest childhood she had always been called "Susy;" which, of course, was softer and prettier, and, in fact, suited her exactly.

"Oh, never mind, darling!" Aunt Betty said, laughing. "What does it matter—let it go."

Rudolf De Vere was leaning at the moment

over the boat-side, watching the mighty green and white waves rushing and seething and tumbling onward below him.

He heard a pretty, clear young voice not many yards away from him crying out, in agitated accents,—

"Oh, stop it!—save it, somebody!" and just then the small fine handkerchief, like a snow-white bird, came flying over his head. With ready outstretched arm Rudolf sprang upwards, and so captured Aunt Betty Dawson's all-but-lost property not a second too soon.

And the thing was done; and a life-long friendship, and something more, was begun.

The brief sea voyage was very pleasant after that, for all three of them were hardened travellers; and, when the boat from Boulogne arrived at Folkestone-pier, they did not go on at once to London by the waiting boat-train; but, acting upon the elder Miss Dawson's happy suggestion, they sent on out of the way their mountain of luggage, and themselves remained behind to enjoy an excellent luncheon, served at the Imperial Hotel.

"It is understood that you are our guests, mind. We invite you. You cannot say 'No' to an old woman, Mr. De Vere," had declared Aunt Betty, with a charming smile.

"Particularly after having saved—well, not exactly my aunt herself, but certain'y her pocket-handkerchief from a watery grave," had added Susy Dawson, demurely.

Rudolf had not the faintest intention of saying "No." With those beautiful dark-blue eyes of his, which somehow always looked most serious when he felt most inclined to smile, he was staring meditatively at Elizabeth Dawson's little soft iron-gray curls which clustered so becomingly, not to say coquettishly, above her delicate brows, iron-gray tinged like her hair, beneath the close brim of her dainty Paris bonnet. The younger Miss Dawson wore a bewitching bat also with "Paris" writ large upon it; but both were yet in slight mourning for their relative, Oliver Dawson, the father of one, the brother of the other.

"An old woman! You should not call yourself that," Rudolf murmured, almost pleadingly. "It is a libel; it is distinctly untrue. No one will ever believe you."

"Why not? I am certainly not a young one. How in the world can I be so, with a grown-up niece of twenty-three?" And, besides, what is the use of trying to appear as young as my niece, Susy? Every sensible person would laugh at me, and very properly too, and talk about an old ewe in lamb's clothing—always a ludicrous spectacle, as you must admit, Mr. De Vere!"

Here aunt and niece themselves laughed out joyously together; and Rudolf said to himself that if Aunt Betty really was an old woman as ancient as she made out, why, then she was decidedly the most fascinating middle-aged spinster he had ever in his life come across. And his experience of women of all sorts and ages had been by no means limited one.

That luncheon at the Imperial Hotel was a merry meal; and during it Rudolf heard a great deal that was wonderful about life in far Santa Rosa—it's warm-hearted and loyal natives; its lovely, yet occasionally fickle climate—it's eternal sunshine notwithstanding—and its ever glorious sea. It was at once all interesting and delightful, thought Rudolf, watching them musingly meanwhile, as he listened to the lively talk of the two Miss Dawsons touching their free and untrammelled life in that remote Pacific island.

"We were as free, and as happy in our freedom, as the laughing jackasses and the cockatoos; weren't we, dear?" the elder Miss Dawson said, turning to the younger.

"Yes, dear," Susy Dawson answered, nodding, her bright eyes over-brimming with girlish fun, "and so do we mean to be over here in England, you know."

"Of course. If we thought that we should not be, or could not be, or anything of that sort, we should take the next convenient boat—shouldn't we, dear? and go straightway to our beloved Santa Rosa."

Smiling though she was, the elder Miss Dawson spoke so gravely that Rudolf believed that

she must positively be in earnest. He therefore hastened to assure them that they would be able to do exactly as they pleased, even here in England—nobody would wish to hinder them; they need not fear. On the contrary, everyone would be only too eager to assure them; to welcome them with open arms; to vie one with another in making their London life at all events a perpetual feast of gaiety and pleasure.

For Rudolf knew well enough that wealth, particularly great wealth, finds friends everywhere; that the whole wide world is his, as Emerson says, "who has money to go over it." Yes; the rich at all times may please themselves—the almighty dollar is a power indeed!

*Le Dieu du monde c'est l'argent,
Et ses rois sont les millionnaires.*

And in an incredibly short while, thanks to Rudolf De Vere, the Dawson ladies, aunt and niece, were established luxuriously in their house in Park-lane. There is no doubt that their appearance in London and introduction to London society was the event of that season; and the ladies from Santa Rosa enjoyed immensely the sensation which their advent had created.

On that sunny afternoon in the Row, Rudolph and his charming new friends from over the sea had, like other folk in their immediate vicinity, been discussing the paragraph touching themselves—the Miss Dawsons—and their antecedents in the old Westshire days, which had appeared in the current number of the *Kettle-drum*.

"It was so well and smartly done," Miss Dawson said, bending winnowing from the saddle towards Rudolph's white button hole; "it told people precisely what they wanted to know about us, and just as much as we wished them to be told. We wanted everyone to know the simple truth concerning us, Mr. De Vere. And now he who runs may read it for himself."

"Yes, the truth," chimed in Susy, in her pretty light way, with her eyes and her hair just then full of sunshine, "and nothing but the truth! Far better that people should be told it plain and plumb outright at once, Mr. De Vere—if you'll forgive my putting it so—that that they should be left in ignorance to try and ferret it out unaided for themselves. In that case, some horrible falsehood or other about us would inevitably have been flung to the four winds of heaven."

"Ah, yes, truth is a splendid thing, and has—so we are told on high authority—'a quiet breath.' Truth is at all times best in the long run—that is, of course, when you can really get at it," Rudolf remarked, with his tranquil, sweet smile.

"I am sure I have read or have heard something about 'truth' and 'the bottom of a well,'" said vivacious Aunt Betty; "but I am afraid it has no more meaning for me than the chatter about 'Shakespeare and the musical glasses.' After all, I am inclined to fancy now that intellectual affairs were sadly neglected in our beautiful Santa Rosa."

"We mean to set to work, however, and improve our minds over here in England. Don't we, Aunt Betty?" Susy Dawson said.

"Yes, indeed," Miss Dawson answered, soberly. "It is never too late to mend, even though one be no longer young. I have heard of a great man—I forgot his name—who sat down and taught himself Latin at forty. Yes, Susy darling, we will go right away by-and-bye and live quietly somewhere in the country on purpose. One cannot cultivate one's intellect—it is impossible—during the riot and racket of a London season. I have found that out."

"Come later on, and cultivate it at Monkshood," suggested the master of that grand old manor-house. "Why not, Miss Dawson?"

"How kind of you!—but, no. Later on, remember, you have promised to find for us a nice quiet country place, all to ourselves—far, far away from this great noisy town," replied Aunt Betty; "and I do hope that you will not forget your promise, Mr. De Vere."

"I never forgot my promises," said Rudolf, quietly.

"Ah, no! I am wrong to doubt you for a moment. You are too good to us," rejoiced Miss Dawson, earnestly. "By-the-bye, whilst I think of it, did you write the *Kettle-drum* paragraph

yourself, Mr. De Vere? It occurred to me that perhaps——"

She paused and looked at him inquiringly.

"I! No. I simply took down in pencil, as you may remember, the pith of what you wished the paper to state, and I gave my notes, just as they were, to Douglas Rex to knock into shape," Rudolf explained in his gentle way. "Douglas does a lot of odd work, you know, for the *Kettledrum*."

"We hear that you know all the 'literary' people; as the Duchess of Dumbolton calls them," said Susy. "How I wish that you would bring some of them, the most eccentric and amusing, to Aunt Betty's *Wednesday Supper-after the Theatre*. Do, Mr. De Vere!"

"Yes; bring this Douglas Rex for one," said Aunt Betty herself; "and then we can make his acquaintance and thank him personally for his clever paragraph. I'll send him a card—shall I?"

Rudolf looked doubtful; he hesitated.

"Mr. Douglas Rex is a very old friend of yours, is he not?" Miss Dawson asked, as Rudolf remained silent. "I fancy we have heard you say so!"

"My oldest—I may say my dearest friend," Rudolf De Vere replied slowly then. "We were chums as boys together at Harrow; we were chums as young men together afterwards at Cambridge; our friendship indeed has been the unbroken friendship of years. But the world of late has used Douglas hardly; money troubles have come to him, yet through no fault of his own; and almost involuntarily as it were he has drifted into journalism and the habits characteristic of Bohemia. He is now rarely ever to be met beyond the precincts of the Strand and Fleet-street."

"Do you mean that he frequents taverns and—and other dreadful places of the kind?" cried Aunt Betty, trying to look horrified and succeeding but indifferently.

"Er—er—well, I believe there are certain haunts of Douglas's in which he might possibly feel more at his ease than in your drawing-room in Park-lane," answered Rudolf, mildly evasive. "Don't mistake me," he added, marking the slight upward movement of Miss Dawson's fine gray brows—"Douglas is a gentleman. But when a man is poor and shy, or, let us say, hyper-sensitive perhaps in his poverty, he does not as a rule care for society; on the contrary, he shuns it; turns his back upon it—society, I mean, don't you know, in the ordinary acceptance of the word?"

"I know. And so Douglas Rex is shy, is he? More's the pity—for shy men are a mistake!" exclaimed Miss Dawson; whilst Susy Dawson chimed in with,—

"And Mr. Rex is a celebrated writer? How delightful! Oh, you really must make him come to us next Wednesday, Mr. De Vere!"

"I'll try; but you mustn't blame me if I fail. Nor ought you to run away with the notion that Douglas is a famous author," smiled Rudolf. "He isn't yet; nothing of the sort; perhaps never will be. It is true he has written one or two farces, which have been accepted but never acted; and I believe he has lately finished a novel of sensation and adventure, concerning which he hopes great things. At present, however, Douglas Rex lives chiefly by newspaper work—it is more certain and regular, you see, and pays better."

"Well, any way I shall send him a card," Miss Dawson declared again. Their horses were growing fidgety; were impatient to be moving—to rejoin the galloping throng in the Row.

"Bye-bye, Mr. De Vere, where does your friend live?" inquired Aunt Betty, checking her spirited steed.

"Hogarth Chambers, Boswell-court, Fleet-street—very near the sky."

"Thanks. It is rather long—but I'll remember. Shall we meet at the duchess's to-night?"

"If you are going—yes, I shall stroll on early from the Bric-à-Brac. Safe to be a dull affair there."

"A *Vientôt*, then. Come, Susy! I am desperately hungry, dear; more than all, I want a cup of tea."

Rudolf stared after them until he could no

longer hear the thud of their horses' hoofs. Then, still leaning upon the rail, he lighted a cigarette, murmuring to himself as he did so,—

"What spirits—what go—what *chic* for a middle-aged woman! I wonder—yes, I wonder she has never married. Odd!"

Rather was it not odd that the thoughts of Rudolf De Vere should be dwelling so persistently on the aunt and not on the niece, her lovely junior? For Rudolf himself was yet a quite young man; remarkably good-looking; only one-and-thirty—whilst years had gone by since youth and Elizabeth Dawson had said farewell to each other. People said later on that she was old enough to be his mother, perhaps his grandmother; but then Mrs. Grundy had always a venomous tongue. *

Arrived home in Park-lane, the Miss Dawsons in their habits ran lightly up to the drawing-room, where hot and fragrant tea was made ready for them in a moment. After dinner they were going on to the smartest ball of the season; that always given in June by the Dowager Duchess of Dumbolton.

"I feel somehow in the wildest of spirits, dear," cried Aunt Betty. "I can't imagine why!"

"Perhaps," suggested Susy, "it is because you mean to enjoy the ball; and perhaps, dear, it is because this afternoon we——"

"Oh, never mind why!" interrupted Miss Dawson radiantly. "We won't seek for a reason, dear. When one is happy it is wiser not to analyse too conscientiously one's feelings of the hour."

She put down her cup, began humming.—

"*Toujours à Toi*," caught up her habit deftly with one hand, and set off waltzing about the small, wide, dim rooms in an astonishingly lithe-some and youthful manner.

"Po-o-f!" cried she, halting suddenly—"I cannot breathe in the thing. I am suffocating. Off it comes, dear. Away it goes. So!"

First Aunt Betty tossed her riding-hat on to the nearest sofa, where her gold-topped switch and gauntlets were already lying; and then in a trice she had snatched off her wig—for it is the sad and sober truth that Elizabeth Dawson did actually wear a wig—and sent that flying on to the sofa too.

Having thus disengaged herself of the strange yet undeniably becoming disguise, at the same time exclaiming gaily,—

"There, dear, now I am as Nature made me!" she continued her wild and light-hearted capers around the darkened, flower-scented rooms.

If a footstool or a tiny chair perchance impeded her route, she sprang over it as nimbly as a kangaroo in Santa Rosa Island might have done.

At this extraordinary exhibition of featheredness and agility on the part of Aunt Betty—although it was by no means the first time that Susy Dawson had witnessed a similar spectacle—her niece fell back in her low chair shrieking with laughter, which she strove in vain to subdue.

"Stop—do stop, dear, please!" gasped Susy at last. "You'll kill me else. I cannot bear it—it is too much! You look so—so—. Ho, ho, ho!"

And the young girl pressed both hands to her head, and rolled about helplessly in her chair.

"*Toujours à Toi*," meanwhile hummed the elder Miss Dawson; and she danced and capered, and leaped over the little chairs and footstools, unmoved; and indeed with the most amazing ease for one of her years.

"Pray—stop—do, darling!" panted Susy, with streaming eyes. "Somebody—anybody—may call, you know; may come in this very minute and catch us on the hop. Ho, ho, ho! And then—and then—everything would be discovered—it would be all over with us; we should be found out; exposed in the society journals—the *Kettledrum* and all the rest of them—and—and everybody in future would cut us dead!"

Exhausted, Aunt Betty at length sank down on the floor by Susy Dawson's low settee, and laid her elderly, wigless head upon her lovely niece's knee.

"You dear, clever, lively old thing!" Susy

managed to say, and forthwith relapsed into wilder mirth than ever.

Aunt Betty had by this time in a measure recovered her breath; and their laughter then became a screaming duet.

CHAPTER III.

"AT HOME IN PARK LANE."

A FASHIONABLE gathering was to the fore in Park Lane, and lighted carriages, in the sultry, summer midnight, lined the famous thoroughfare as far as the eye could see.

The town mansion of the Misses Dawson was brilliantly illuminated; and sounds of revelry came out to the darkness through the open and balconied windows which looked over the trees in the park.

It was Miss Dawson's "At Home" night. She, desirous to strike out a line for herself, and knowing the value and force of originality, called it daringly her *Wednesday Supper—after the theatre*. There was dancing also, an invitation-card informed the recipient, at the Wednesday night "At Homes" at the pretty house in Park Lane.

Altogether these weekly parties of the Misses Dawson were as delightful as they were informal; and such was their success and their growing fame in society, that a very great personage indeed—the recognised head and ruler of it—had recently expressed a wish to honour the entertainment with his presence. It was whispered that he would be in all likelihood appear in Park Lane on the night of the last Wednesday in June.

High was the glee of Miss Dawson on learning the honour in store for her; and again did she dance a *pas seul* round her spacious drawing-rooms now whimsically kicking the becoming gray wig before her as she went!—the niece, as on that other occasion, meanwhile convulsed with merriment at the agile yet graceful antics of the aunt.

To-night the crush and crowd were even something greater than usual; at any rate there seemed to be a larger number than usual of young men present in the supper-room and about the corridors of Miss Dawson's house—and there had never been a lack of young men at any time during the evening on an occasion such as the present.

During the past few days neither the Countess of Bearwarden nor her friend Lady Winterbourne had been idle; that is to say, they had made themselves vastly agreeable to anyone of their acquaintance who, in his or in her turn, might be acquainted, however slightly, with the strangers from Santa Rosa Island.

The result of their labours was that somehow or other they obtained cards for Miss Dawson's Wednesday night; and both ladies were now to be seen in the room where dancing was going briskly forward, seated near to each other against the wall, their big fans unfurled, and their bedizened heads bent together behind them.

Downstairs, in the supper room, two young men—"chums" and "chapies" it was their pleasure to call themselves—were drinking champagne; each having dutifully escorted his mother to the party in Park-lane. They were Lady Winterbourne's son, the Honourable Colin Chepstow, and Viscount Lowater, the son of the Countess of Bearwarden.

They had already been introduced to the "fair colonials," as they lightly named Miss Dawson and her niece; the one through the agency of Major Braeme, the other by the Duchess of Dumbolton herself.

Like all amiable, idle young men about town, they held no mean opinion of themselves and their fascinations. Only to try to win a woman's favour was to succeed forthwith in the endeavour—so they honestly believed.

"It is a pity, though, dear old boy, is it not, that their name should be *Dawson*?" The Honourable Colin Chepstow said, drawing on his gloves. Although not at anytime especially fond of dancing, he was going to ask one of the Miss Dawsons to dance—really he did not in the least

care which. "Dawson! It might have been somethin' more aristocratic—mightha'nt it, now?"

Lord Lowater thereupon finished his champagne, and began leisurely to follow young Colin's example. He likewise, though he danced like a giraffe, meant to ask one of the Miss Dawsons to dance with him; and as with Colin Chepstowe, Lowater cared not a rap which.

For, after all, it was the popular belief, other rumours to the contrary notwithstanding, that Oliver Dawson's—the late guano merchant's—extensive wealth was equally divided between his two lucky kinswomen.

"Yes, old chappie; 'tis certainly rather a pity, now you mention it," Lord Lowater agreed. "But when they've a mind to do it, they can soon alter that, don't you know?"

The Honourable Colin Chepstowe did then what he did not often do; he reflected for a moment or two before he spoke.

"Ah, yes, of course; I see what you mean!" he exclaimed. "When they marry, of course, 'twill be a case of, 'We've change tout cela!' as Corney Gwain used to sing, I remember."

And then these two admirable young men gave a hitch and a twist of their stiff collars and cuffs, glanced at themselves in the nearest mirror with a wholly self-satisfied air, and proceeded together to make their way upward to the reception rooms above, where Liddell's band was playing a lively German waltz.

They mounted, however, but slowly, for the staircase, with its stately palms and banks of exquisite flowers was still crowded with guests who, like the angels in Jacob's dream, were ascending and descending at the same time.

Midway they were brought to a standstill for a little while, and Lord Lowater took the opportunity to whisper to his friend,—

"Look here—I say, Colin, old man! Which one are you steering for?"

"Oh, the old one," answered young Colin, confidently.

"She's such toppin' fun. She can sing a comic song, they say!"

"All right, old chappie," was his lordship's contented rejoinder; "then I'll make for the young one. You know I don't care."

And, with infinite patience, on they moved again.

In the gallery at the stair-head, when they did get there, they were fortunate enough to encounter Miss Dawson the younger. The Viscount approached her somewhat diffidently; and the Honourable Colin Chepstowe, leaving them there, continued his enterprise alone.

Always rather shy and silent in the company of women who were gentlewomen, Lord Lowater now hum'd and er'd and ha'd a good deal before he could make Susy Dawson comprehend that he was asking her for the waltz which the band was then playing—that nothing in the world, indeed, would give him so much pleasure, etc.

No dance cards of any kind were distributed at these informal "Wednesday Suppers." The musicians, of course, were furnished with the desired programme—merely half-a-dozen round dances or so, as a rule; but the guests themselves were bothered with nothing of the sort. This was simply a whim of Aunt Betty's own—it was not a regular ball, said she.

"No; I cannot dance with you, Lord Lowater," Susy said, frankly, "because a moment ago I refused three other gentlemen. But this you may do, if you will—you may take me downstairs and give me some supper."

"Delighted! nothing in the world I should like better! For—for the fact of the matter is, I *detest* dancing, don't you know?" declared his lordship, eagerly, letting, unintentionally, the truth slip out.

"You *detest* dancing!" echoed Susy, turning her clear bright eyes full upon him. "What a singular thing, Lord Lowater! For if you *detest* it, why on earth did you ask *me*?"

The Viscount flushed to the roots of his smooth straw-coloured hair, and even beyond them—forehead, ears, neck and all. He told Colin Chepstowe, afterwards, that he felt like a newly-boiled prawn all over—he did, by Jove!

But if Susy was mischievous she was also tender-hearted; and if she saw through him,

she also, just then, pitied him. So, whilst he was recovering himself, and in his embarrassment offering her the wrong arm, she chatted on brightly and naturally enough, and soon eased the slight awkwardness of the situation.

"I am famished," she declared; "and if I were to dance with you, Lord Lowater, I should drop it! We have been this evening to see the new piece at the Haymarket, and the crush and the heat were terrible; and then, ever since we got back from the theatre, I have been here, helping Aunt Betty. Altogether we have had a busy night of it—a larger reception than usual, as you see—and now I think that I have earned some supper. Do not you?"

The Viscount who already began to fancy himself in love with the sprightly "Colonial," assured Susy fervently that he did indeed think so; and once more he fought his patient way upon the stairs, this time downward, with Susy Dawson on his arm.

He glanced furtively once or twice at the girl's pretty profile; though the beauty and the taste of the gown she wore was lost entirely upon his understanding.

"Had no idea she was so pretty and jolly—hadn't by Jove!" he was thinking. "She's rippin', as Colin would say."

Meanwhile, in the sheltered balcony, into which opened the windows of the chief reception-room, and in which as in the gallery and on the staircase, tall and flowering exotics abounded, sat Rudolf De Vere and the elder Miss Dawson. They spoke but little, a tranquil, pensive mood seemed to have fallen like a mantle around Aunt Betty.

The night outside was exceeding fair; and they had come hither to breathe the air of it. In the gloom of the roadway, beneath shone the many lamps of the waiting carriages; the tired servants for the most part half asleep; the weary standing horses shaking at intervals their clanking harness.

Above were the high white stars, bespangling in their millions heaven's wide purple dome.

A few yards removed from the low red seats now occupied by Rudolf and Miss Dawson, other couples were leaning upon the balcony-rail, staring sentimentally upward at the starry sky.

"Ascot," "Cup Day," "the favourite," "Hurlingham," "the Prince," "Marlborough House," "Ellen Terry," "Church parade," "Lords," "Henley," "Goodwood," "Cowes." These words and others of a like significance were wafted in murmurs every now and then to the ears of Rudolf and his quiet companion.

"This time last year we were in Santa Rosa," she was musing, a curious little smile just touching her lips in the starlight, "and now—ah, the difference!"

Somewhere she was conscious that Rudolf's beautiful eyes, full of vague, unspoken sympathy and serious interest, were at that instant resting upon her; so, quickly lifting her own from a feigned contemplation of her white ostrich-feather fan, and still smiling a little, she steadily met the gaze of those serious eyes of his, and said serenely:

"Were you trying to read my thoughts, Mr. De Vere?"

"Perhaps," he answered candidly. "It is likely enough—I hardly know."

Then someone—a man—not far from them on the balcony, began to talk gently to the woman who was with him about a certain smart divorce case, which it seemed was impending. It was the scandal *par excellence* of the season.

"Pah!—p-o-h!" said Miss Dawson, rousing herself, and sharply opening her big, white, fluffy fan, "do not let us listen to them, Mr. De Vere. Let us think and talk of something else. Do you know that I am beginning to hate, actually to hate, this great idle, pleasure-seeking, selfish London of yours, with its endless round of idle extravagancies. What are they all, virtually? what as often as not do they lead to!—vanity and vexation of spirit unspeakable! Oh! they must early pall, I fancy, upon the wholesome minds of healthy people. Susy and I, at any rate, are growing weary of London, Mr. de Vere, and we shall be so glad, by-and-by to get right away

from it all. Sometimes, indeed, we catch ourselves thinking very longingly, almost regretfully, of the life we lived out in Santa Rosa. It may have been a tranquil life, with little or no excitement in it—humdrum and common-place, if you will—but it was certainly a free and wholesome one at its dullest."

"I can believe it. But now that you are here, Miss Dawson, back again in the old country, surely it would be folly to think of returning thither!"

"Folly? I am not so sure of that," was the light rejoinder. "But of course we mean to try England in the country first. Have you yet heard of a house that might suit us?"

"Not yet. I have enquired about several. At present, however, I cannot find what I know would be the right thing. I wish," said Rudolf earnestly, "you would try Monkshood. I know Monkshood would suit you. I want to let it—at least," said he, correcting the fib, "I should like to lend it to you. I would neither let it nor lend it to anybody else in the world."

Elizabeth Dawson looked grave. Once more, with small bent grey head, amid the soft little coquettish curls of which diamonds of the first water flashed and burned, she fell to studying the anatomy of her feather fan. Was she smiling again to herself? The balcony-awning cast a shadow over her face, and Rudolf could not see—could not be sure.

"No. I do not think that is a good plan," Miss Dawson said at last.

"Why not?" asked Rudolf, in a grieved tone.

"For various reasons. Besides, if we decide to remain in England—and after all I suppose we shall—we want to buy a place of our own, Susy and I."

"I would sell you Monkshood if I could. But you know I cannot. It is not in my power, owing to the entail," said Rudolf, his voice a trifle hurried, and his breathing too, as he leaned towards her.

Straight into his dark-blue eyes she looked—looked and smiled—a smile of perfect, sweet friendliness, a smile that few men perhaps would not have given much to win, fanning herself slowly the while with her large white fan.

"But we could not, would not, take Monkshood from you, even were it in your power to sell it," replied Aunt Betty, softly. "How could we? it would be barbarous! though we thank you for your generosity all the same."

"I would give you Monkshood," he was beginning impulsively, almost passionately, "if—if—" But here she laughed and stopped him.

"Let us be reasonable. I am afraid we are fast drifting into stupidities," Miss Dawson said; adding with animation, and turning the talk capriciously into another channel. "By-the-bye, you have not told me why Mr. Douglas Rex is not here to-night. Wouldn't he come?"

With something very like a sigh of relief Rudolf sank back in his chair. He was dimly aware that he had been upon the brink of saying something foolish, perhaps indeed of making a fool of himself, and he felt absolutely grateful to Miss Dawson for her timely check to the catastrophe.

"No. Douglas wouldn't come," he said, in his old easy natural way; "I couldn't make him. I did all I could to persuade him."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" Aunt Betty exclaimed.

"So am I; because I honestly believe, Miss Dawson, that to know you and your niece would do Douglas a lot of good. An occasional visit to your pleasant, cheery house here would brighten him up, I'm certain; would soon make another man of him—a more hopeful man, I mean."

"What! is he low-spirited, then, poor fellow?" Miss Dawson inquired, with ready and genuine sympathy.

"Well, I have seen him frightfully down at times—the 'blue devils,' you know," Rudolf explained. "Genius and poverty run ill together—are a hard combination. Chatterton found them insupportable. I don't say that Douglas Rex is a genius, mind—a second Chatterton; but I do say that I believe his gifts to be of a high order, and that, under happier conditions, those talents of his would shine out brilliantly. Hitherto he has had no chance."

After a brief, thoughtful pause, Miss Dawson said,—

"And you really think that we might do him good, Susy and I, if we knew him?"

"I am certain of it. I told him so," Rudolf replied.

They were steering clear of all absurdities now.

"Very well, then," said Aunt Betty gaily; "it is merely just one more instance of Mahomet and the mountain. We will ourselves go and call upon Mr. Douglas Rex, this genius in embryo, this hermit-crab of Hogarth Chambers, since Mr. Douglas Rex refuses to come to us here in Park Lane. We will introduce ourselves with the best grace we can in the circumstances; and our excuse for our boldness shall be that we have called to thank him in person for his capital paragraph in the *Kettledrum*."

"Will you, though? How good of you, Miss Dawson!" Rudolf exclaimed warmly. "It is a splendid idea, if you are positively in earnest about it."

"Why not?" rejoined Miss Dawson, with her quick, sweet, bewildering smile. "The proceeding will be unconventional, but you say that it will be kind. Besides, am I not old enough to take care of myself?—to please myself in so small a matter as this without risking the indignation of Mrs. Grundy? Why, Mr. De Vere, I have defied, laughed at Mrs. Grundy all my life! With Susy, alone, of course, it would be different," said Aunt Betty, with becoming severity; "but under my wing, with me, her aunt and chaperon, nobody could hint at indecorum, nobody could possibly object——"

Out from the window nearest to them stepped a strapping in flawless evening attire. He screwed in his glass, strolled towards them with his hands just lodged in his trousers' pockets, and coolly interrupted their *étre à-tête*.

"Hullo, Miss Dawson!" lisped he, with the overweening confidence of callow youth—the young assurance that feels assured of a welcome no matter where—"you hidin' here? Been huntin' for you everywhere. I want you to give me this polka, don't you know. Will you? Do!"

"Do!" was uttered softly, nearly whispered, and with the Honourable Colin Chepstowe's most soulful and engaging air.

"I am not dancing to-night, thank you," laughed Miss Dawson. "I find it too warm work. It is far pleasanter sitting here."

"Then let me sit here too," said the Honourable Colin Chepstowe, in so pleading and wooing a tone that the elder Miss Dawson laughed outright again. "May I?"

Rudolf De Vere, however, was seized then and there with a wild desire to strangle young Colin where he stood. But, showing none of the annoyance he felt at the interruption, he rose, nodded to the interloper, yawned slightly, and said in his gentle way,—

"Take my chair, Chepstowe, if you like. I am going for a cup of coffee and a cigarette."

"Shall we see you again?" Miss Dawson inquired.

"Oh, yes," said Rudolf, carelessly, and went away.

Colin forthwith dropped into the vacated low red chair, and dragged it quite confidentially close to Miss Dawson's knee.

Aunt Betty eyed him with keen amusement, as, with glass screwed tightly into his eye, he lifted his pert beardless face, and said:

"After all, it is jolier sitting out here, isn't it? I'm so glad I found you; I weakly am. And how kind it was of De Vere, wasn't it, to take himself off like that? Some felahs never can see when they are *de trop*, don't you know?"

"Some can't," Aunt Betty agreed. "But Mr. De Vere can, as we have just seen."

She looked so sweetly demure as she spoke; her eyes beneath their gray, delicate brows, glistened with so lovely a light, that the Honourable Colin Chepstowe waxed momentarily bolder, and soon flattered himself that it was coy encouragement that he read in her mirthful glance.

"And have you been to the theatre this evening, Mr. Chepstowe?" added Miss Dawson, very kindly.

Colin, stooping over her knee, began to finger and toy with the fluffy white fan feathers.

"No, dear Miss Dawson," he lisped, in an affectionate undertone, "not exactly to the theatre. Lowater and I have been to the Troc."

"The—the—the what?"

"The Troc, dear Miss Dawson," said Colin, woefully.

"Oh, I see—the Troc. Short for Trocadero, I imagine. Y—e—s, I think I understand. For even away in Santa Rosa we always received and studied our *Punch*, though it was often considerably more than a month old when we got it.

"Oh! rippin' it is thus to sport and to 'spoof,' As a Jubilee Juggins with plenty of 'ooof,' To shout and to yell at the 'Pav.' and the 'Troc.' Regardless of——"

So Aunt Betty was quoting merrily, when the Honourable Colin, laughing as he had not laughed since his Eton days, broke in upon her recitation.

"I perceive that I have not done you justice, Miss Dawson," said he; "and I beg your pardon for it! You are more knowin'—pon my word, I ask your pardon again—I—I mean more accomplished and up to date than I gave you credit for being. You must forgive me for having mi-judged you," said this artless young man, holding out his hand pleadingly, with a fine show of sincerity, yet within himself wondering all the while whether two hundred and fifty thousand pounds were the actual portion of Aunt Betty, or five hundred thousand pounds—which was said vaguely to be the sum total of the wealth of the late Oliver Dawson.

"Are you going, then?" Aunt Betty asked, glancing at his outstretched hand.

"Oh, yes, presently. But just at this moment I am feeling miserable; for in my thoughts I have wronged you as it were; and I want you to forgive me, don't you know?" Colin pleaded absurdly.

"Nonsense! Do not be ridiculous. You have done nothing to require forgiveness," Aunt Betty laughed; yet, responding to his foolish humour of the moment, she lightly placed her slim, white hand, all afire with its wonderful gems, in that of Colin Chepstowe.

He grasped it tightly; gazed at her in a beseeching soulful manner, or what he meant for such; and so kept it prisoner.

"Mr. Chepstowe!" she exclaimed, now really indignant at his fast-growing audacity, "let go my hand immediately."

"Will not you call me 'Colin'?" he whispered. "Do. Everyone that knows me does—they all do, really—I mean—I mean—Well, I wish that you would too, dear Miss Dawson. Why not—eh?"

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I don't believe you know what you are talking about, you ridiculous boy. You have been taking too much champagne or something—How dare you! My rings are hurting me, sir! Release my hand this instant."

Conscious it may be that he had ventured too far, Colin obeyed.

He had also the grace to look sheepish; and his finger and thumb went straying upward in search of the half-dozen callow hairs upon his upper lip which he had been heard to call his moustache.

Miss Dawson rose then abruptly; stood there before him on the balcony tall, straight, shapely—a justly offended goddess, thought Colin penitently.

"Let me pass, Mr. Chepstowe, if you please. People are leaving and are looking for me," she said.

"May I call to-morrow?" said Colin, humbly; possibly not a wholly mock humility.

"That is as you please, of course. We shall not be at home to-morrow."

"Ah! I've done something now with a vengeance, haven't I? You are weakly angry with me, I can see," said the Honourable Colin Chepstowe simply. "Won't you—won't you try to forgive me just this one time, dear Miss Dawson? I'm afraid I've made an infernal ass of myself. I cannot say more—can I?"

Aunt Betty's lips twitched; but she managed on the whole to keep her features grave, and to say, stiffly,

"Yes; I'll try to forgive you this once, because you are very young and don't know any better; but never, mind, Mr. Chepstowe, if it happens again. So remember."

With small disdainful head held high, she swept in queenly fashion past the ingenuous youth; and Colin, left alone under the balcony awning, screwed in his glass and stared after her.

"Yes; she's topin' fun," sighed he.

The Countess of Bearwarden and Lady Winterbourne drove home together in the carriage of the former.

"I asked Lowater," said the fat countess, with a mighty yawn, "how he had got along, and he said—let me see—yes, he said 'Swimmingly.'

"And I asked Colin the same thing, Lady Winterbourne said, catching the yawn of her friend, and he said directly, 'Rippin'."

In the dim light of the homeward-bound carriage the two peeresses smiled comfortably to themselves; and then each went to sleep in her separate corner, to dream of Oliver Dawson's coveted half-million all the way home.

The two young men, however, did not follow the wise example of their respective mothers, and go straight home to their beds on leaving Miss Dawson's mansion in Park-lane. They went on instead to the rakish chambers of a mutual friend who expected them; there with a few others—birds of a feather—to play poker and baccarat until five o'clock in the morning. No wonder the Viscount's eye had a vacant and watery stare, and the eyes of the Honourable Colin were as pale and pink as a ferret's!

"I am glad you did so well, Colin," said Lowater to his friend, kindly and impressively. "If you got on with the old girl only half as well as I did with the young one, why, you did thunders well, old man. That's all I can say."

"Judge if I did not do well, if we did not get along together, old chappie," cried Colin gleefully, but suppressing modestly part of his experience. "She spouted jokes from *Punch*, and called me a Jubilee Juggins!"

(To be continued.)

FOR VIOLET'S SAKE.

—:—

CHAPTER I.

DOCTOR FELL.

MADELINE RAYMOND was standing at the open window of dear Old Faircliff Abbey, looking seaward at an outward-bound vessel, and sighed deeply.

"A year to-day!" she murmured, "a whole year of weary days, which have woven themselves into wearier weeks, and weariest months. And this is Christmastide! a reason which ought to be bright and gay.

"My Cecil spent the last with me, and told me of his love before he went away into the great unknown world, to win such a fortune as will be expected from the man who becomes the husband of the heiress of Faircliff Abbey. Hey day! how hollow the world is!

"If I have money, what matter if he lack it? But the world does not look at things in that light, not even my own dear parents. Mother would not have cared, but papa would never consent to my marrying a poor man. We Raymonds are a proud race!" and Madeline sighed again impatiently.

She was a rarely beautiful girl, tall, and statuesque, with a lissom, willowy figure, exquisitely proportioned, and a sensitive high-bred face. Her hair was a bright shade of golden brown, naturally waved and curling.

Her face oval in contour, and tender in expression, while her eyes were as blue as forget-me-nots.

"How the sun shines!" she cried, irritably. "Cold winter sunshine, without a ray of warmth in it. It is just as heartless now as it was when

I stood here a year ago, and watched Cecil's ship sail away, with its great white wings. Shall I ever forget it? I was upon this very spot, and it sped along as that vessel is now doing, skimming the blue water like a sea-gull. How brilliant the day was! How the sun shone, and caught every tiny crest of the ocean, turning them into a myriad of diamonds.

"How bright it was! all but my heart. The golden sunbeams, the sapphire sky, the emerald sea, were all a mockery to me, for Cecil, my own love, was passing away from me, going farther and farther over that waste of waters, to an unknown future, and my heart, my life, my soul, were following him.

"Cecil, my love," she cried, passionately, "when will you come back? when? when? I am ever watching for the sails to return; and when I see them, when I know you are coming, then my heart will sing for joy. I shall laugh with the sunshine, and each silver-crested wave, as they bear you back to me. Then my joy, my soul, my life, will all return with you, and the ripples of my laughter shall not be less silvery than the wavelets," and the girl extended her white hands as though her lover could clasp them.

"Madeline," said Mrs. Raymond, who had entered the room unseen, and laid her hand upon her daughter's shoulder before she was aware of her presence. "Madeline, are you star-gazing by daylight?"

The girl started painfully and uttered a sharp little cry.

"Did I frighten you, darling? You had relapsed into quite a transcendental mood."

"If I must confess the truth, you did."

"I am sorry for that, I came to wish you a happy Christmas," and she kissed her affectionately.

Tears rushed to Madeline's eyes.

"My dear child, what is the matter?" asked Mrs. Raymond, trying to soothe her.

"Nothing, it is nothing, mother; only I am quite unnerved since Cecil went away."

"Poor Cecil! poor fellow! I miss him too, child, I have no boy of my own, and mothers love to have a son to lean on. I had so begun to lean on Cecil. Since the days when you and he played at being sweethearts together, I always thought it would end in something serious between you; but your father preferred Arthur Deering. I must confess that he ever was a noble-hearted lad, but his father, Sir Arthur Deering, was a very rich man, and so proud. I felt more at home with Squire Vernon, and Cecil takes after him, with his genial ways. It is sad to think that the old man should have mortgaged the estate as he did, and left poor Cecil such a heritage."

"He means to redeem it, mother," said Madeline, with sparkling eyes, "and when Cecil means a thing he does it."

"I hope he may, indeed."

"I was thinking about him when you came in," continued the girl with trembling lips, "and oh! mummy, dear, you must not expect me to be happy. I am very, very miserable. If Cecil were even permitted to write to me—but I seem utterly cut off from him. Father ought not to have sent him away. He has only one child to think of, and he might have studied my happiness."

"Hush! I never mind, darling, try and believe it is all for the best. What is to be will be."

"Yes, 'she sara, sara,'" cried the girl passionately, "I know it; I am growing fatalistic. But, Mother, it was not for the best to send Cecil from me, it could not be for the best. Papa—"

"Stop, Lina," said Mrs. Raymond, gravely; "think before you speak. Whatever your father has done, rest assured he has acted out of love for you. All he desires is your happiness."

"And think you he has secured it by sending Cecil away?" asked Madeline, scornfully. "I tell you, mother, I have no pleasure left in life."

"My child," answered Mrs. Raymond seriously, "This is wrong—no pleasure in life, when you have a father and mother who love you, and the prettiest and most picturesque home in Kent. Where would you find such another as Faircliffe Abbey, with its splendid sea-view, and its exquisite homestead scenery, and all your kind and

affectionate friends and neighbours? No pleasure in life, when the sun shines on the beautiful earth; when the dewdrops sparkle upon the grass blades, and the hoar-frost makes a fairy-land even of the spiders' webs, and every tree and hedge is a tracer of silver! No pleasure in life, when the flowers bloom and exhale their fragrance, and the sun gives his warmth and brightness, and the moon her gentle light; and the birds well nigh burst their throats with the joy of it all! No pleasure in the verdant tints of spring, in the golden glory of autumn; in the delicate down on the butterfly's wings, and its wondrous colouring? Come, Madeline, you could never have meant it. Acknowledge that you are wrong," and she took her daughter's hand in her own.

"You are right, mother. You always are," returned she affectionately. "I wish I were one-half as good and patient as you. I know I am headstrong and wilful, and I cannot help feeling that papa has been unkind, very unkind."

"He has sent Cecil away, and for such a reason, forsooth, because he is poor!"

"I am his only child, as I said before, and, surely, out of his great wealth he might have provided for us both."

"That is just it, Lina. Your father, although a man of old and good family, is, and always has been, a man of business."

"The Raymonds have amassed their own wealth. They have ever been shrewd and active men. He does not think it is good for a young fellow to be dependent on his wife for his daily bread, and, I must say, I agree with him—it enervates the character. You and Cecil are both young. You can afford to wait."

"If I know anything of him, with such an incentive to work, he will make his way in the world, and come back better in every way for having had to fight the battle of life for himself."

"It strengthens the muscles to swim against the stream for a time, and, thanks to the good opening offered him by Mr. Godfrey, there will be but little adverse current for Cecil. A few years at the longest, and he will prove what he is made of, and whether he is worthy of you."

"Absence will test his faithfulness. It strengthens real love, while the spurious articles, passion and fancy, fade."

"This is all your father wants, Madeline."

"You are a great heiress, my child, and we must satisfy ourselves that your lover is worthy of you before we can give you into his hands."

"Look out over the sea, dear, is it not lovely? Can you still say there is no pleasure in life? I am getting old, but I can enjoy all its beauties still."

"You have father's love and mine, of course you are happy," said the girl petulantly.

Mrs. Raymond looked at her with gentle reproach.

"And have you not our love too!"

Madeline did not answer for a few moments, and her sensitive nostrils gave signs of her agitation; presently she flung her arms round her mother's neck.

"Mummy, I was wrong. I have still much to be thankful for. I have, as you reminded me, you and papa, and this dear old house. I believe I love every brick of it, and every tree and flower and shrub in the garden. Many girls have none of these things."

"That is my own daughter once more. I thought the cloud would soon pass. But listen, dear, I can hear the sound of a horse's hoofs; who can be coming at this early hour?"

"Madeline ran to another window of the room which commanded the carriage drive and looked out.

"It is Mr. Godfrey," she said; "what can have brought him here?"

"He has, as you know, taken Cecil's house; and bring there all alone, your father talked of inviting him to dinner to-night, so probably he has ridden over to give his own answer."

"What! at ten o'clock? that is being very friendly," she said sarcastically.

Then she turned suddenly, and looked into her mother's face.

"Mummy, do you like him?"

"Like him," repeated Mrs. Raymond, with a

smile, "why, Madeline, I have never asked myself the question; I suppose I do."

"Well, I know I don't," answered the girl with determination. "I know I ought to do so after his kindness to Cecil, but I never can feel quite comfortable in his presence. I always fancy he is watching me; in fact," she continued, lowering her voice, "I do not feel that I can trust him. I have an instinct against him!"

"You are a strange girl, Lina; I certainly know of no reason to mistrust Mr. Godfrey," laughed Mrs. Raymond.

"But surely you know what I mean, mummy," said she excitedly. "Is there not something underneath in his look? Do you not see what I have noticed in his face? He has gone into papa's study; I am so glad he is not coming here; I breathe more freely."

"He certainly is not so handsome as Cecil Vernon, dear; for the rest I have not remarked his looks as minutely as you seem to have done. Your father thinks highly of him; they have done a great deal of business together lately, and papa wishes us to be very civil to him."

"Civil! of course; but come, are there not very hard lines about his mouth?"

"Well, it is not like Cecil's," said Mrs. Raymond, smiling; "but then, you see, he is old enough to be Cecil's father, and faces do not improve with time. With you, I think it is a case of Dr. Fell."

"The reason why I cannot tell, but I do not like you, Dr. Fell!" laughed Madeline. "That is just what it is, mother; I do not like him, though I cannot assign a valid reason for it."

"My dear," said Mr. Raymond, opening the door, "breakfast is quite ready, and we can take care of each other. I shall persuade him, if I can, to stay and spend the day. He is a wonderfully clever fellow, and I am never long in his society without picking up a wrinkle. I am shrewd enough in business, but I am nowhere with him."

"There is such a thing as being too clever by half," said Madeline, suddenly, laying her hand upon his arm, impressively. "Father, do not trust that man too far."

There was a long breathing space of silence.

A look almost as if of fear fell upon Mr. Raymond's face. The next moment he laughed.

"My dear, if he were a scoundrel, your warning would have come too late. Our interests are deeply involved together; but I have no reason for mistrusting him, none whatever."

"Father, disentangle yourself from this man," said Madeline, in a low, earnest voice.

"Tut, tut, child, you don't understand business. I couldn't if I would," and then he added, brightly, "I wouldn't if I could. It is all right, my dear, never fear, and you, of all people, ought to stick up for the man who has helped your lover into a really good berth—there goes the gong."

"Mr. Godfrey is an early visitor," said Madeline, coldly, and followed her parents into the breakfast-room.

CHAPTER II.

RUIN.

MR. GODFREY was standing with his back to the fire, perfectly at home.

The Yule-tide log was casting bright and fitful flames over the pretty breakfast-room, which Mrs. Raymond used to declare was the most comfortable apartment in the house.

It was furnished with every modern comfort, and was the room chosen by the ladies for the morning, and contained their work-tables and Davenports—a cottage piano, Madeline's easel, and books, and the cosiest of easy chairs.

Now the walls were hung with holly and mistletoe, and it looked brighter and even more homely than usual.

"A merry Christmas to you," said the visitor, "I hardly hoped to see the ladies at this early hour, but my good friend here will not hear of

my going away again," and he laid his hand in a confidential manner upon his shoulder, then added, "I need hardly say, I am not anxious to dispute his wishes."

"Well, you are just in time for breakfast," returned Mrs. Raymond, kindly, "let us begin at once, for my daughter and I are going to the eleven o'clock service, and there is not much time to be lost."

"No doubt we shall get a chat later, Mrs. Raymond," said Mr. Godfrey, "I confess I am looking forward to the pleasure of a *tête-à-tête* with you—now, is not that an admission, Raymond? more especially when it is made in your presence," and he turned to Madeline's father with a laugh.

"Open confession is good for the soul," he answered heartily. "No doubt that young puss there will be running off somewhere in the course of the afternoon, and you will have her mother all to yourself."

Madeline looked up with flushed cheeks.

"Mother, I shall go to the Deerings after church," she said, decidedly.

"You are both cruel and kind," continued Mr. Godfrey suavely. "Cruel to show offence at my remark, and kind in giving me the opportunity I seek; but perhaps you will hereafter find that I am only acting for your happiness and good," he said, with assumed earnestness.

"I fail to see how my happiness can in any way be affected by you, Mr. Godfrey," she returned with hauteur.

"Possibly, Miss Raymond," he answered, with an unpleasant smile, as he accepted a plate of delicate cutlets from his host's hand, and a cup of coffee from that of his hostess, with ease and politeness; "but you are young, and may live to learn that there are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy," and a pause ensued.

Suddenly he lifted his strange eyes to Madeline's face, and fixed them upon her with a mocking expression.

"Have you any news from the West Indies?" he asked.

"You need scarcely make such an inquiry," she answered warmly, with rising indignation visible in her dilated nostrils, and quivering lips. "You know perfectly that my father forbade Mr. Vernon to write to me until he had made his way in the world."

"To be sure," he replied indifferently, "I had forgotten. You may like to learn that I had news from Vernon yesterday."

All the wrath vanished from the beautiful face, and an expression of intense eagerness replaced it; the bright eyes pleading for satisfactory intelligence.

"Had you?" she cried excitedly. "Oh! do tell me, was he well? Did he write in good spirits? Did he send me any message? Please tell me. What did he say?"

"Miss Madeline," answered the other, leisurely wiping his mouth with the dinner napkin, "you are a little too quick on me. I may forget one question in trying to remember the next, but now let me see. Vernon was quite well, his letter was very cheerful. He was staying with some charming people, and wrote in terms of highest admiration of the young lady of the house. I can recollect no mention of you, nor of our good friends here. His epistle contained one piece of very bad news. 'Yellow Jack' was playing an ugly tune in the island; they had had no trade-wind for a long time—and—but, dear me! perhaps I had better not have told you," he added with pretended concern, for Madeline was gazing at him with a white face and horrified eyes.

Mrs. Raymond glanced at him reproachfully. "Much better not—but the mischief is done now." Then she turned to Madeline gently. "Do not fret about this, darling, yellow fever—."

"Carries people off by hundreds," answered the girl with enforced calmness. "I know all about it, mamma—do not invent any polite fictions for my benefit. But Cecil is young, and strong, I do not greatly fear for him," she added, as she turned her eyes bravely upon her persecutor, and continued sarcastically, "It was *kind* of you, Mr. Godfrey, to bring me the earliest tidings: you have indeed proved your regard for my

happiness!" and rising, she left her breakfast, and swept proudly out of the room.

An uncomfortable silence followed her exit.

Then Mr. Godfrey looked up.

"You spoil that girl, Raymond," he said, sharply.

"Perhaps you would do the same if you had an only daughter," interrupted his wife before he could answer.

"I think not, Mrs. Raymond, and as an old friend, pardon me when I say I consider you let your girl have her own way too much—it makes her—"

But Madeline's mother did not let him finish his sentence.

"We have no fault to find with her," she replied warmly. "She is a good, affectionate child. The cares of life must come some day. I wish her to be happy while she can; but I feel certain that if ever she be called upon to bear trouble, she will do so bravely."

"I am glad to hear it," he returned in a dry tone, "for she may have to suffer sooner than you anticipate."

"Is that a preface to ill news?" asked Mrs. Raymond, looking at him intently with an anxious gaze. "If so, for Heaven's sake, speak out. Is Cecil ill? Has he fever? Did you tell her what you did to break some greater blow to her hereafter?"

Mr. Godfrey had finished his breakfast; he now rose and paced the room as though his emotions were too much for him, but in reality he was trying to suppress the look of triumph in his evil face.

At length he stopped before her, and spoke with well-feigned feeling.

"Mrs. Raymond, of all the painful missions I know, the worst is to be the bearer of ill news, especially to friends. Yet it is better that it should be told by those who really feel for you, than by a stranger, who would be indifferent to your feelings."

Mrs. Raymond sought her husband's eyes, but they were cast down to the ground, and he was looking sad and depressed.

Their guest followed her glance.

"Raymond knows all," said he, shortly, "and he has left me to break it to you."

"Not now, not now," answered the master of the house with emotion. "This is Christmas Day, you might have let them enjoy it."

"As you will," returned Mr. Godfrey. "Tomorrow will do as well for me; I am in no great haste."

Mrs. Raymond rose and went to her husband's side, and clasped his hand in hers.

"George," she said, pitifully, "what is it?"

He lifted his heavy eyes to her face, and gave her a long and almost passionate kiss.

"My dear," she continued, "too much has been said, or not enough. I must know all. Are you in trouble? or is it Cecil? Do not keep me in suspense."

His lips moved, but no words came, and he cast a pleading look at the man whom he believed to be his friend.

"Mrs. Raymond," said Mr. Godfrey, "both Raymond and I have been speculating largely, and we have both burnt our fingers, but it is worse for him than it is for me, for he is ruined, and I am not so deeply involved. I only received the news late last night, and came round this morning, hoping to be in time to save him, but it is too late."

"Ruined!" echoed Mrs. Raymond, staring at him blankly.

Mr. Godfrey took her trembling hand in his.

"It is an ugly word," he said, not unkindly; "I do not wonder at your shrinking from the sound of it. It means loss of home, money, and I had almost said friends, but there is one who will stand by you. Mrs. Raymond, Sam Godfrey will help you, if you will let him."

"Thank you," she answered, dreamily, "you are very kind. Ruined! I can scarcely realize the meaning of the word."

"Ah! You will realise it soon enough," he answered sadly.

Mr. Raymond looked up.

"There is one hope left, Marion; we may stave off ruin," he said in a deeply agitated voice. "Yes!

there is one hope; I will assist you if you will render my assistance possible; you will readily understand that you will have to leave the Abbey!"

"It will be sold, of course."

"Perhaps I shall bid for it, who can tell?"

"You," repeated Mrs. Raymond in amazement.

"Surely you would not live here alone?"

"No, not alone; it would be useless to me as a bachelor, but I would marry to-morrow if I could gain the woman I love."

"And you cannot?" she asked, her interest growing in spite of her sorrow.

"I have not yet tried; in time, with your help, I may be able to do so."

"My help?"

"Yes!" he asserted with a strangely triumphant voice, "I love Madeline; make her my wife, and I will, with my own fortune, stave off this ruin from your husband."

Mrs. Raymond turned deadly pale, and sank into a chair.

"Impossible," she gasped. "Consider her age and yours; besides, you know her affections are already engaged. Pray do not think of it."

"Not think of it!" he answered passionately, "I do nothing else but think of it, and in time—in time it will come to pass."

"Never," sighed Mrs. Raymond, "she will be true to Cecil as long as he lives."

He turned hastily to the window, and an evil gleam shot from his eyes.

"Then he must not live," he muttered through his set teeth.

After a while he came and took a seat between the husband and wife.

"You must both help me," he said smoothly; "I love your daughter; persuade her to marry me and I will undertake that you shall never leave your old home. I have more money than I know what to do with, it shall be yours; you shall want for nothing, and the business shall go on upon its old footing, Raymond. No one shall ever know how near you were to the Bankruptcy Court."

"If Madeline only would," said Mr. Raymond, fervently. "My dear, do you think there is any chance of it?"

"Not the slightest," returned his wife, in agitation. "We could not ask such a sacrifice of her."

"Not to save you from ruin?" queried the merchant in surprise.

"Not even for that could we influence our child," said the mother, firmly; "nor advise her to break her plighted troth to the man who loves her."

"My wife is right," added Mr. Raymond, looking fondly at her, "there is no disgrace in poverty; we cannot force our daughter's inclinations."

"Spoken bravely!" said Mrs. Raymond proudly. "We thank you for your proposal, Mr. Godfrey, but we cannot entertain it."

"Madam," he said, as he rose with an evil look, "we shall see! Under existing circumstances I must decline your friendly invitation, Raymond. As it will be your last Christmas at the Abbey, you would doubtless prefer to spend it alone. Mrs. Raymond, should you change your mind, you may count upon me as a friend, and if there be ought I can do to help you, pray command me. Raymond, one word with you in the library, and then I will depart."

And with a ceremonious bow he followed his stricken host from the room.

When Mrs. Raymond found herself alone, she gave way to her bitter grief, tears of mental agony running slowly down her white face.

"Ruined!" she murmured. "Ruined! Only one word, but how full of meaning! To part from this dear home of twenty years, to see the lines of care gather upon my husband's brow, and his silvered head bowed with sorrow, not to know whence our daily bread will come; to feel the pinch of poverty in old age, when the mind is unfit to bear it. But I am younger than he is—can I not work? And then there is our child! My poor Madeline, who thought she knew her worst sorrow in being parted from her lover for a season."

Madeline Raymond had seen her father's face

as he passed along the hall, and now stood within the room, watching her mother's distress.

"It is that man," she murmured. "I always mistrusted him. What can he have done thus to upset both my parents?"

"Oh! what will become of us?" cried the unfortunate woman, with a sudden uplifting of hands and head.

In another moment Madeline's arms were about her.

"Mother! Mother! what is it? Tell me your sorrow," she pleaded.

(To be continued.)

WOMAN, GIVE US TRUE WOMAN.

'Tis said by those who ought to know
The belles that put the dash on,
That dead folks' hair from living heads
Will soon be out of fashion;
That hemp will retrograde, and sink
Back to its former uses,
And never rise again to deck
Our Marys and our Lucys.

That overskirts of every style
And grade will soon go under,
And roomy bonnets, curtained deep,
Will cease to be a wonder;
That twelve good yards will make a dress
Of suitable pretensions,
When thirty-five or forty odd
The grand *bon ton* now mention.

Oh, will the blessed days e'er come
Of old, almost forgotten,
When woman will be woman, not
A bunch of hemp and cotton;
When maids and matrons will not make
Mere dress a perfect passion,
And spend their precious hours and days
In following after fashion.

M. A. K.

ALISON'S MARRIAGE.

—10.—

CHAPTER XXIII.

JAMES CHAPMAN had behaved liberally so far as money went to his sister; he fulfilled his promises to the very letter, and when she left Heatherley, she carried with her crisp bank notes to the value of fifty pounds.

She did not travel with Mr. Chapman; it would not have been natural for the bereaved husband to escort his wife's maid.

They parted company at Southampton, and Mrs. Henman having some time to wait beguiled herself by buying a local paper. In this the charms of an inn just then vacant, were set forth in a graphic advertisement. It was represented as a splendid investment, and the incoming tenant was only required to pay a hundred pounds of which half could remain on mortgage.

Perhaps the widow was tired of the great northern seaport where she had suffered so much; perhaps she was afraid the fell disease which had carried off her eldest girl might attack her other children.

Mrs. Henman was a woman of resources; she must spend some of her precious capital in providing her children with respectable clothes and getting them to Southampton, but her brother had made her a present of his wife's boxes and all their contents; if she disposed of these advantageously she might be able to offer forty-five pounds down for the genuine business, and she decided to call on the proprietor at once.

Her appearance impressed him favourably. In her tidy black dress, and warm, winter cloak, she looked a very substantial person. The bargain was struck; and within a week of that quiet funeral at Heatherley, Mrs. Henman was established as landlady of the Petrel, her elder children helping her in the business, the younger attending the nearest board school, and the whole family more prosperous than they had ever been before.

Mrs. Henman, who regarded her brother James in some sort as a benefactor, wrote to inform him of her change of residence. He left the letter

unanswered, and would probably never have troubled his head about it, but for his strange meeting with his wife, and his urgent need for some place in which to conceal Alison until he had broken her spirit and bent her to his will.

The lawyer was quite sharp enough to know that in an ordinary hotel or boarding house, unpleasant questions might be asked. Helen was bound to be faithful to him, and though he guessed the Petrel was probably a very humble inn, he thought it would serve his purpose.

No wonder the flyman had to ask his way to the Petrel; no wonder Dr. Dale could not recall it to his mind among the Southampton hotels he knew. It stood a mile out of the town in a quiet rural road, and was more like a country cottage than a public house. The lower rooms had been converted into bar and tap-room. There was stabling at the back, and on each of the upper floors three good-sized rooms, so that besides stowing away her own family, Mrs. Henman had a chance of taking lodgers.

Leaving unconscious Alison in the fly, James Chapman went into the bar to speak to the landlady. She recognised him at once; he could tell it by the trembling of her hand. But she betrayed nothing, only saying, civilly, she had two empty rooms, but she did not think they were good enough for a lady.

James said he should like to see them, and followed her upstairs. Safe from listening ears, he spoke more fully.

"I have found my wife, Helen. We must have the whole of the top floor. And I shall expect you to carry out my orders implicitly. I'll make it worth your while."

The children were told that the lady had been taken ill and could not continue her journey.

Kate, the eldest girl, busied herself in making the top front room ready. And when her mother and Mr. Chapman, between them, carried up the invalid, she helped Mrs. Henman to undress her and put her to bed.

"She's real beautiful, mother," said the girl, "but she looks like death; and this place ain't good enough for her."

"Never you mind what don't concern you," said Mrs. Henman, tartly. "Go right down and see to the washing up. And mark my words, Kate, if I catch one of you children up these stairs, it'll be the worse for you."

After her daughter had gone, Mrs. Henman carefully removed Alison's out-door things to her own room, then having cut off all chance of her prisoner's retreat, she locked the bedroom door upon her, put the key in her pocket, and went back to her duties in the bar of the Petrel.

Mr. Chapman had gone back in the fly to Southampton. He engaged a room at the South Western Hotel, partook of a recherche lunch, smoked an excellent cigar, and made his appearance at the Petrel just as tea was over, and Mrs. Henman was thinking of going to look after her captive.

"Come in here," she said to her brother, leading the way to a room on the same floor as Alison's, so that their talk might not reach the children. "Now, James, I'm willing to serve you faithfully, but I can't work in the dark. Who is that girl, and why have you brought her here?"

"She is my wife—the wife who deserted me on her wedding-day. I didn't care to go back to Oakhamstead, to be a laughing-stock to everyone as the victim of a runaway bride. Besides, I wanted to be free to look for her without her family bothering me with suggestions, so I gave out that she was dead. A pretty dance she has led me, the time and money she has cost me; and I never got the slightest clue to her hiding place, till to-day I met her quite accidentally at Waterloo Station, got into the carriage next hers, joined her at Basingstoke, and by the exercise of a little ingenuity made her unable to resist my authority."

Mrs. Henman looked anxious.

"You've a right to your own wife, I suppose, James, but I'm a mother myself, and I won't let any harm come to the girl in my house. I won't have her killed by your drugs and things."

"As her life is worth exactly twenty thousand pounds a year to me, I shall be as careful of her as you can desire," he said, sarcastically.

"Twenty thousand pounds a year? Why, James, you must be dreaming."

"I'm in earnest. As soon as the breath is out of her uncle's body—and he is an old man in failing health—my wife becomes mistress of Combe Lorraine in Northshire, and the income I have named."

"And she knows it?"

"She has not an idea of it. I am going to tell her of her good fortune now, and of my intention to share it."

"And if she refuses?" suggested Mrs. Henman. "From your story it looks as though she hated you pretty badly."

"I have ways and means," said Chapman, airily. "She does not leave this house except in my company as my wife. Remember, Helen, I don't want you to be unkind to her; she may have anything she fancies, but outside this house she does not stir, and no letter she may manage to write must be posted."

"You had better not try and see her to-night," said Mrs. Henman, practically; "she'll be more likely to hear reason after she's had some sleep."

"Very well." It was strange how he shrank from an interview with his victim. "I will come back at ten to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Henman meant to be kind to Alison; she waited on her attentively, made her some tea and toast, and when she found her bent on getting up helped her to dress, and seated her in a large easy chair by the sunny window before she delivered her brother's message.

"You seem kind," said the girl, faintly, "but you can't know what I have suffered; be merciful to me and let me go away before he comes."

"There, there, my dear, you don't know what's good for you," said the woman, soothingly. "Mr. Chapman'll make you a great lady, and where would you go to, pray, without any clothes or money?"

"I have some money," breathed Alison faintly, "and I will give it all to you except just enough to pay my fare to Heatherley, if only you will let me go."

"My dear, you've no money now, I reckon. Mr. Chapman saw to that when he left you."

Alison put her hand into her pocket; her purse was gone. She looked round the room for her small travelling bag; that, too, had vanished.

"Just stay quiet," urged Mrs. Henman, "and listen to Mr. Chapman. He means nothing but tenderness to you; he'll give you things fit for a princess if only you're sensible."

An hour later the key turned in the lock and James Chapman entered, drew a chair opposite Alison and sat down, husband and wife bound to each other for all time, though in all the eight months since their wedding-day they had lived apart.

Chapman looked at the girl with a sort of grudging admiration in his evil face.

"You're prettier than ever," he said, sullenly, "and you belong to me, you're my wife, mine by every right of Heaven and man, I don't mean to let you escape me again. Alison, we'll start on our honeymoon to-day."

She shuddered, she would rather he had sworn at her and abused her; she would rather he had struck her than that he should have looked at her with that passion gleaming in his eyes.

"Let me go," she pleaded, "I will never trouble you, all I ask is my freedom."

"Don't you know you're my wife," he said, harshly; "I paid a pretty price for you and you're mine."

She shuddered.

"I ought not to have married you," confessed the poor girl, sadly, "but I did it for their sakes, mother's and the children, I thought we could each go our separate ways, I was so young and didn't know the misery I was planning."

"Where have you been all this time," he asked. "I suppose you'll admit I've a right to know that much."

"I was companion to a lady in Warwickshire, she died six weeks ago, and since that I have been looking out for another situation."

"And living in lodgings?"

"No; I was at Combe Lorraine Rectory; Mr. and Mrs. Spenser were very kind to me."

"Why did you leave them?"

"I heard you were expected at Lord Lorraine's and I was—frightened."

"I should have gone to see the Earl to-day but for my meeting with you," replied Mr. Chapman, "but as my business chiefly concerns you we can go together to-morrow."

"Your business concerns me? But I have never seen Lord Lorraine in my life."

"Then it's high time you made his acquaintance seeing you are his niece and heiress."

The room seemed to go round and round with Alison.

"It can't be. Lord Lorraine's heir is his nephew."

"That's only the public version, the Earl doesn't take the world into his confidence. Lionel Dare may pose as his uncle's heir presumptive, but he knows perfectly that for months past Lord Lorraine has been seeking a nearer heir."

"I know," said Alison, gravely, "but that heir is his brother's son George Dare."

"That's where Lord Lorraine has been making a mistake, because he saw the death of George Dare in the papers he believed his half-brother had died—your father, Alison, was Lord Lorraine's half-brother George Hilton Dare, the George Dare whose death appeared in the papers was your infant brother; you are by the law of England the Earl's next of kin, and the moment he dies you succeed to the whole of the entailed property; it's worth twenty thousand a year besides Combe Lorraine itself, one of the finest estates in North-hire."

Alison sat speechless with dismay. She had thought when James Chapman came into her presence her cup of sorrow was full. A captive in her husband's power, she thought no fresh trouble could come to her.

Now she knew her mistake. She must rob the man she loved above all else.

James Chapman would use her as his tool to wrest from Lionel Dare his future inheritance. Not content with well-nigh breaking his heart she must rob Lionel of all his worldly honours. For full five minutes she was silent, then her resolution was taken. She would not do this thing. No power on earth should induce her to see Lord Lorraine or claim her rights as his niece. She knew but little of law, poor girl, but she felt James Chapman would gain nothing unless he could produce his wife.

Her mind was made up, and the self-sacrifice she had planned seemed to give her new courage. She met her husband's glance unflinchingly. Her lovely eyes never quailed beneath his angry gaze.

"I shall never claim to be Lord Lorraine's heiress; I shall never bring forward the proofs of my parentage."

"Are you an idiot?" he asked, angrily.

"Money can't make me happy," said Alison, slowly. "I wrecked my whole life for it last October, and I have suffered a terrible punishment. My future will be one long sorrow. I can't take my place as one of the Dares of Combe Lorraine. I shall never reveal my relationship to the Earl."

"Then you may be thankful you have me to do it for you," thundered Chapman. "Why do you suppose I married you except to share your property? Your father left the proofs of your descent in my hands. He died from the shock of finding he was his brother's heir. You refuse your good fortune; but I shall act for you, and in a little while that scoundrel Captain Dare will have his hopes of Combe Lorraine dashed for ever."

Alison was perfectly silent. She knew it was probable even if she did not claim the inheritance, her sister Barbara's right would supersede Lionel's. Well, better so. Bright-eyed Barbara would be a relation the Dares could acknowledge with pride.

Dick Carew would make a fitting king-compt for the mistress of Combe Lorraine. There would be no sting for Lionel in seeing Barbara his uncle's heiress. She had not broken his heart.

"I am waiting," said Chapman, shortly. "Will you be reasonable and come with me to Northshire to-morrow?"

"I will never go with you, anywhere," she answered, wearily. "If you keep me a prisoner here I can't help it; but you will never break my will. Nothing shall induce me to live with you, and no power on earth shall make me claim the Lorraine property."

"Shall I tell you the consequences?"

"They matter little," she said, in her faint, tired voice. "It may be you will keep me shut up here till I die of weakness and misery. You can't do more than kill me, and I am so tired, life has been so hard to me since father left me, I should be quite content to die."

"That's rubbish!" said Chapman. "You are young, beautiful and attractive; it only rests with yourself to be rich and prosperous. You can't really wish to die."

"I do," said Alison, simply, "and that is why your threats have no power over me. You see the worst you can do is to kill me, and that does not frighten me."

"That is not the worst," he said, grimly. "How, if I shut you up in a lunatic asylum, and keep you there a prisoner for the rest of your days, while I enjoy the Combe Lorraine property in right of my wife."

Alison shuddered. He had touched her now.

"No doctor would pronounce me mad, and—I have a friend who would come to my rescue. You could not claim anything in my name without saying where I was, and if he knew you had shut me up in an asylum he would come to my help."

Chapman's face was livid with rage.

"What friend have you who would help you to defy your husband?" he asked furiously.

Alison shook her head.

"That is my secret. Do not push me too far, Mr. Chapman. I am not the friendless, helpless girl I was nine months ago."

The interview lasted half-an-hour longer, but the result was the same. Alison was deaf to threats and persuasions, she absolutely refused to accompany James Chapman to Northshire or even to take her place in the world as his wife. The lawyer began to get desperate; he told her plainly he would stick at nothing to work his will, and at last left her, declaring a few days of confinement would bring her to her senses.

"I shall go to Northshire," he told Mrs. Hennan, "and see Lord Lorraine. I don't suppose I can get back here till Monday. Remember, I trust her in your care. If she escapes I'll never forgive you. Keep her safely and I'll pay you well."

"I'll see to it she does not escape," said Mrs. Hennan. "The lock of that room's safe enough, and I've taken away her hat and cloak; she's not a penny in her pocket, so there's not much chance of her getting far, even if she did get the door open."

"She is not to get it open," said Chapman; "I don't want a scandal made in the place."

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was late on Friday when Barbara received Mr. Carleton's telegram; it filled her with hope. He would not have sent for her if he had not good news for her; perhaps Alison was not only alive, but the kind old man had discovered her whereabouts, and was going to take Barbara to her sister.

It was little sleep the girl had that night. She was so excited she could hardly eat any breakfast, and she reached Waterloo so early that the train was not up, and she had to wait some time until she could take her seat. Even when it had started she loosed to give the wings of her own impatience to the flagging engine, which was not really slow, as the whole journey took little over two hours; but to Barbara's feverish eagerness the time seemed almost an eternity, and when Mr. Carleton greeted her at Southampton station, he was almost frightened at the white, strained face.

"This will never do, my dear," he said kindly; "you must come and get some lunch before I say a word; you'll want all your strength and all your woman's wit, too, Bab, if we are to do any

good. I'm an old stager, and yet I can't make up my mind whether we're far on the right trail, or if I've just brought you down here on a fool's errand; there's one thing I'm certain of though, whoever lies buried in that grave in Heatherley churchyard it's not your sister."

Bab's eyes brightened.

"Then Alison is alive! I can bear anything after that!"

Mr. Carleton stood over her while she had some lunch; he would not let her off until she had swallowed some cold chicken and a glass of wine, then he hailed an open fly and told the driver to take them to Western Road, preferring not to mention the name of the Petrel Hotel; on the way he told Bab all that he had heard from Dr. Dale the previous evening.

"I came here the first thing this morning, and I have not been idle; I reconnoitred the Petrel and find it's little more than a beer-house; it's at the end of the Western Road, quite out of the town, and it's kept by a widow called Henman."

Barbara started.

"It was Mrs. Henman who nursed Alison—I mean the girl we thought was Alison, in her last illness."

"I know; the maid was engaged at Liverpool, and this innkeeper comes from Liverpool. She took possession of the Petrel the end of last November. It all fits in, Barbara."

"It does indeed."

"Dr. Dale was not mis-taken in Chapman's identity. I found his name in the visitors' book at the Station Hotel. He slept there the last two nights, went to London to-day, and is expected back Monday or Tuesday."

Barbara drew a breath of relief.

"If he is gone, our task will be easier. Oh, Mr. Carleton, I feel sure the poor girl Dr. Dale saw in the train was Alison."

"Well, I hope you're right. Now, what's to be done? This Mrs. Henman is, of course, in Chapman's pay. He's given her strict orders, I expect, not to let any one see his wife."

They got out now, and dismissed the fly.

Barbara and Mr. Carleton walked slowly past the inn. There was nothing unusual about its appearance. The white blinds of the upper windows were all lowered, but that might have been to keep out the June sunshine, which was very hot and brilliant. A decent-looking woman could be seen in the bar serving customers, and a pretty, neatly-dressed girl was helping her. There was no air of mystery or concealment about the little inn.

Bab looked at the place with yearning, passionate eyes. Oh, that those walls could speak, and give up the secret of whether they held her sister captive!

"Now, Barbara," said her kind old friend, "what next?"

Barbara shuddered; she was so terribly anxious, so fearfully in earnest.

"You can't go in and ask for refreshment," said Carleton; "it's not the sort of place for a lady to patronize, and your going there would attract suspicion."

Barbara had an inspiration.

"If we could get the woman away, I think the girl would be easy to manage."

"But how?" asked Mr. Carleton. "Depend upon it, she's on her guard."

But it was worth trying; it seemed the only way of making even an effort to get inside the house.

Mr. Carleton and Barbara went into a little stationer's farther down the road, and the detective indited the letter.

He dared not make it from Chapman himself, as Mrs. Henman might know his writing; so it was dated from the South-Western Hotel, and ran,—

"Gentleman named Chapman, staying here, very ill, and wishes to see you at once. Lose no time, or you may be too late."

"We shall only gain half an hour," said Mr. Carleton. "She'll take a cab, and it won't take her longer than that to go and get back again. Of course, she'll hurry back the moment she discovers it's a fictitious message."

"Half-an-hour will be enough," said Barbara, her lips almost white with intense agitation.

"Before we send the letter, we ought to have a fly ready—if it be Alison, we must take her away at once."

A cab was passing, and Mr. Carleton hailed it. He told the man he might want him to wait some time, but they should not quarrel about the fare.

Jehu grinned, and stationed himself in a quiet side-street as directed. He fancied there was "something up," but so that he made money by it, he did not mind.

The letter was given to a porter, who happened to be passing, with a shilling to take it into the Petrel and come away before he could be questioned. Bab saw the girl receive it and put it leisurely on the counter. The porter was far out of sight before her mother came in and opened it. Apparently Mrs. Henman had no doubts as to the letter, for in less than ten minutes they saw her walk briskly down the street in the direction of the hotel. No cab was passing, perhaps she hoped to meet one.

Mr. Carleton looked at Barbara.

"Are you strong enough, child?"

"Quite."

The girl Kate Henman was wiping glasses when they entered the Inn; she seemed surprised at such unusual customers. Mr. Carleton went to the front at once.

"We have come to see Mrs. Chapman, the lady staying here. Will you please take us to her?"

"I don't know nothing about Mrs. Chapman," said the girl, shortly.

Mr. Carleton looked at her steadily.

"I'm a London detective, girl," he said sternly; "you'd best be careful how you answer me."

"I'm sure I'd no thought to offend you, sir," Kate said, civilly; "but I d'nt know anything of Mrs. Chapman. Mr. Chapman brought a sick lady here on Thursday, but I never heard it was his wife. She's a little cracked in her head, and mother won't let me or the children go near her, lest she should do us a mischief."

"Where is she?"

"Top floor front; but, sir, you can't get in, mother's taken the key in her pocket. She says she's answerable to Mr. Chapman for the poor lady."

"We will go up alone," said the detective, gravely. "I am an officer of the law, this young lady is Mrs. Chapman's sister, so you would refuse our entrance at your peril."

"I'm sure, sir, I never wanted to do wrong," said poor Kate; "but I'm not used to maddies, and I feel quite dazed."

"Come Barbara," said Mr. Carleton; "steady, child, above all keep calm."

They stopped at the top of the second flight of stairs. Kate, who had followed them half angry, half alarmed, pointed out the door, and taking the key from the next one, said quietly,—

"I shouldn't wonder if this would open it, the locks are much the same."

It did open it. A glance from Mr. Carleton, and Barbara went in alone. A bitter cry escaped her, and John Carleton following hastily, found her on her knees tugging with her slender fingers at the knots of a cord which bound Alison closely to a chair.

"Oh, my darling, my darling!" cried Bab, brokenly, "have I found you at last?"

"Is it a dream?" asked Alison, wistfully. "Oh, Bab, don't let him find me."

Mr. Carleton came forward.

"No one shall distress you, my dear young lady. I am a great friend of your sister's, and I am going to take you back with me to Heatherley where my wife and daughter will do their best to make you feel at home."

But it was too much for Alison. One hand still clung to Barbara, but she sweet eyes had closed, it was a fainting girl whom Mr. Carleton raised in his arms and carried out to the waiting cab, which, according to his instructions had come just opposite the "Petrel," as soon as the driver saw Barbara and her escort enter the little inn. Kate Henman was a sharp girl. She knew at once that whatever plot Mr. Chapman and her mother had been engaged in in homely language "the game was up." She slipped into her mother's room, and brought out

Alison's out-door things and small travelling bag.

"They're hers," said Kate defiantly. "You'd better take 'em. I don't want you to come back and say my mother's a thief."

Mr. Carleton had placed Alison safely in the fly at Barbara's side; he plunged his hand into his pocket, and brought out a sovereign which he placed in Kate's outstretched palm.

"I don't blame your mother, my girl, I expect she's been made a tool of."

And the cab drove off.

CHAPTER XXV. AND LAST.

THEY were all gathered in the library at Combe Lorraine. James Chapman, the Earl, Lady Mary Dare and her son. Lionel would gladly have been excused, but his mother thought if James Chapman were really the man to escape whom Alice Hope had left the Rectory, they might find out something concerning her from him, and to that view Lal had yielded.

Mr. Chapman went to the point at once. He laid before the Earl the certificate of George Hilton Dare's marriage with Emily Tucker, of the birth and death of their first child George—a letter from George Hilton to himself, setting forth his reasons for dropping the name of Dare and authorizing James Chapman to write to his half-brother, Lord Lorraine, for assistance for his wife and children should he die suddenly. The certificate of his death followed.

"It seems clear enough," said the Earl, "and after all my search for an unknown nephew, it seems it is a niece who is to succeed me."

"It is quite clear," said Lionel, slowly, "the eldest of Mr. Hilton's daughters is your heiress, uncle. I only wonder," turning to Mr. Chapman, "you did not communicate with Lord Lorraine before."

"I had a certain delicacy in doing so," said the lawyer. "Miss Hilton became my wife on the last day of October; but, unfortunately, she left me with a slight misunderstanding, and it is only lately that we have been reconciled. Alison is, I grieve to say, in very delicate health or she would have accompanied me to day."

Lionel Dare sprang to his feet.

"Don't believe a word he says, Uncle Geoff," he said to the Earl, "he is not reconciled to his wife. He does not even know where she is. My cousin Alison told me with her own lips last Wednesday her one object in life was to hide herself from her husband. She left the Rectory only because she heard Mr. Chapman was expected here."

Lionel Lorraine started.

"You can't mean the girl we heard of as Alice Hope was really Alison Dare. If so her resemblance to my stepmother's picture is easily explained, as she is her grandchild."

Chapman addressed himself to his host; ignoring Lionel utterly, he said,—

"My lord, every word you have heard only confirms my story. My wife, Alison, owing to a lamentable mistake, was hiding herself from me under an assumed name. She is now reconciled to me, and I have only left her alone because I felt some explanation was due to you."

The Earl of Lorraine was an old man, but his shrewdness and clear judgment were unquestioned. He looked at Chapman coolly, and replied,—

"Give me the address of my niece Alison, and I will communicate with her myself."

"Surely, as her husband—" bustered Chapman.—"I have a right to—"

"You have a perfect right to share your wife's fortune when it comes to her," said the Earl, coolly; "but I may live a dozen years, and Alison can claim nothing till my death. I wish to make acquaintance with my niece. If I am pleased with her I will settle a handsome income on her."

Chapman was foiled; and he knew it.

"If your differences are adjusted," went on the Earl, "I shall be happy to welcome you both on a long visit here; but if my niece has

really a grievance against her husband I am the proper person to protect her. I do not choose my heiress to be a lonely wanderer, dependent on strangers' charity. Alison's rightful home is either with her husband or under my roof."

"I think you are quite right," said Lady Mary, gravely, "we ought to hear Alison's own story."

Chapman blustered about his rights as a husband, but he found he made no impression. He said at last he would return to Alison and ask her to write to her uncle. Perhaps Lord Lorraine would be satisfied then that she was neither a prisoner nor a martyr, but an idolized wife. He would not accept the hospitality of Combe Lorraine a single night; he should return at once to London and tell Alison the harsh reception his claims on her behalf had met with.

Neither of the gentlemen offered to shake hands with Chapman as he walked out of the room. Perhaps the verdict of him in their hearts endorsed Lady Mary's sad remark,—

"Heaven help the poor girl. Well, if she is a sinner, it would be punishment enough to be bound to such a man!"

The family at the Castle thought they should hear no more of James Chapman for at least two days; but early on the Sunday morning as the Earl and Lady Mary sat at breakfast, a messenger arrived in hot haste from Denton, an important junction about thirty miles off to say a gentleman in attempting to join the London express the night before had been thrown down and seriously injured.

There was no hope of his recovery, but the doctor thought he might be conscious for a few moments before the end. A letter in his pocket had evidently been written by Lord Lorraine; there was also about him various papers relating to the Lorraine family, and so the doctor in attendance had sent off a special messenger to the Earl by the first train.

"You will go to him," said Lady Mary. "Remember he holds the secret of Alison's hiding-place; much as I doubt the reconciliation he boasted of, it seems certain she has fallen into his hands."

The Earl was not a man to shun an urgent duty, repugnant as it might be to him. Noon found him at Denton Cottage Hospital only just in time.

James Chapman had recovered consciousness, and life was ebbing fast.

"Tell Alison"—the words came painfully and with an effort—"to forgive me. It was not only the money; I did love her."

"Where shall I find her?" asked Lord Lorraine. "Only tell me that and I will give her your message."

"The Petrel Inn—Southampton. Mrs. Henman—not her fault—I made her," and then all was over.

The impression left on the Earl's mind was that Mrs. Henman had in some sort injured his niece, but that as she had acted under Chapman's orders she was not responsible.

He told his sister she must go with him to Southampton, and as Lady Mary had a great desire to see Ali on she readily consented.

But when they reached the Petrel late on Tuesday evening, Mrs. Henman denied all knowledge of her charge. She herself had been decoyed away, and poor Mrs. Chapman had been stolen out of her keeping while she was absent. But there, she was a poor mad creature, no good to an one.

Kate, perhaps with the hope of earning another sovereign, followed the Earl out to his carriage.

"She weren't no more mad than I am," said the girl, confidentially, "and the gent who came was a detective. I heard him tell her he'd take her to his wife at Herstalbury. His name's Carleton, for I heard the other gal call him by it. Herstalbury's but a small place; you can't fail to find him."

Lord Lorraine and Lady Mary Dare crossed to Ryde, and drove out to Heatherley early the next day.

As Kate had said, there was no difficulty in finding Mr. Carleton's; they got his address at once, and were soon at Mrs. Stone's house.

"Mr. Carleton's gone to London," was her in-



"THE RECTOR IS SURE TO BE IN CHURCH ; WILL YOU COME IN AND LET HIM MAKE US MAN AND WIFE ?" SAID LAL, GENTLY.

formation, "and Mrs. Carleton's nursing a sick friend. You can see Miss Hilton, if you like."

The Earl went straight up to Barbara and took her hand.

"My dear," he said, gently, "I am your father's brother. Can you forgive me for leaving him to die in poverty ? This is your Aunt Mary, and we've come here to try and find your poor sister."

The tears stood in Bab's eyes.

"Mr. Carleton and I found her on Saturday, and brought her here, but she is terribly ill, and Dr. Dale says he has very little hope. You see her life these last eight months has been one long terror, and now brain fever has come on, and she has no strength to struggle with it. I believe if James Chapman finds her out and comes here, the very sound of his voice will kill her."

"Be easy, my dear child," said Lady Mary, tenderly, "she will never hear that voice again. Alison is a widow."

Mrs. Chapman struggled slowly back to life, and then when summer had faded into autumn, Lady Mary took her abroad, certain that in Alison's fragile state she needed perfect change of scene and freedom from all that could recall the misery of the past year.

The Earl, who had learned to love his niece dearly, would gladly have taken her home to Combe Lorraine, but Lady Mary feared the painful associations the place must have for her.

She took Alison to Nice with Barbara (reluctantly released by Mr. Carleton) as her companion. Here Dick joined them for Christmas, winning Lady Mary's heart, and making her think little Bab a very lucky girl.

As Alison's guardian, Lord Lorraine had much to arrange. He gave up for his niece all claim on James Chapman's property, assuring John Carleton he was sure it would bring her no happiness. He sought out Mrs. Hilton, and made her happy by a promise to allow her three hundred a year ; and if he longed to reproach her for her

harshness to her elder children, he kept silence, remembering how dire had been her poverty.

He meant to give Barbara a handsome marriage portion, and to have her wedding from Combe Lorraine.

But there was one person who troubled the Earl very much, and whom he called "an obstinate fellow," though in his heart he understood and appreciated the scruples which so annoyed him.

Lionel Dare declared the gulf between his modest fortune and the heiress of Combe Lorraine was so great, he should never press his suit to Alison. Before she came home he would exchange into another regiment on foreign service.

"And if you do, I'll never speak to you again," growled the Earl. "You'd break your mother's heart and kill that poor child outright, just to satisfy your foolish pride. I'm ashamed of you."

He took care not to tell Lal when the travellers were expected, and Captain Dare arrived to pay a farewell visit to his uncle the very day of Alison's return. The Earl greeted him cheerfully with,—

"I'm awfully busy, Lal. Run up into your mother's boudoir ; there's something there I want you to look at." And unsuspectingly Lal pushed open the door to see—the one love of his life, the girl who had fainted in his arms in the Rectory garden one little year ago.

"Alison !"

"Lal !"

"I thought you would come," she whispered ; "you never wrote, you never sent me a message, but I was sure you had not forgotten."

And with those blue-grey eyes shining with sweet love light in their depths, Lionel forgot his pride, forgot his objection to an heiress ; he opened his arms, and gathered Alison to his heart saying fondly, "My own, at last !"

It was not a double wedding. Dick and Barbara were married with all fitting pomp and ceremony in late June, but the heiress of Combe Lorraine shrank with nervous dread from all talk of wedding plans for herself ; it was as though

she could not forget that terrible ill-omened first marriage that had so wrecked her life.

Lal was very patient with her ; the license and wedding-ring had been in his possession weeks before he ventured to mention them ; but one bright, sunshiny September day when he and Alison were walking through the country lanes together, he said gently,

"Sweetheart, do you know it is two years today since I first saw you ? I want this to be a double anniversary in future years, not only of our first meeting, but our marriage. The Rector will just have finished the Litany, as it is Wednesday, and so is sure to be in church ; will you come in and let him make us man and wife ?"

"But——"

"It's better so, dear," he whispered, "there will be no time for you to frighten yourself with nervous fancies."

Lady Mary and the Earl sat in their own pew when the young couple entered, Mrs Spender and Dobbs (now maid to the young heiress) were in their usual places ; it dawned on Alison slowly that Lal must have had this plan in his mind long enough to have warned these kindly spectators. When the service commenced, and in spite of all her fears she was really being married, Lord Lorraine came forward to answer the solemn question,—

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man," and as Alison Dare walked down the aisle on her husband's arm, the organ thundered out the wedding-march, and a body of school-children stood ready with flowers in the porch waiting to scatter them in the bride's path.

"It was just like Lal to think of such a thing," said Mrs. Carew, when the news reached her ; "only Dick I do call it hard that you and I were not there to see ALISON'S MARRIAGE."

[THE END.]

PHOTOGRAPHY on marble has been accomplished
by a London artist.



"I MUST HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD THE SERVANT'S DIRECTION; I WANTED MR. TREMAYNE," SAID STERLING, WITH SUPPRESSED LAUGHTER.

AFTER BITTER PAIN.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A ROUND dozen! No wonder, when Mr. Tremayne looked on his tribe of children, that his anxious face took a more anxious look, and the upright lines of thought upon his brow grew more pronounced. He was a gentleman—he might be never so shabby, but he could look nothing less. Generation after generation of Tremaynes had made the old Manor ring with merry laughter, for they were an essentially jovial race. Here they had lived, loved, and died from time immemorial; and poor as they were now, it was a common saying in the county, when a neighbour lifted his head high, "He is as proud as a Tremayne."

Mrs. Tremayne, a gentle, motherly woman, much younger than her husband, was the second daughter of an impoverished lord, and brought nothing into the Manor but her pretty face and form, with her good heart and gracious ways for dowry. It was a mad match, everybody said; but, for all that, and in spite of the many cares it had brought, it was a happy one.

The eldest of the brood was Jess, a tall, fair-haired girl of nineteen, pretty and high-spirited; then came Psyche, who, at seventeen, was small, slender, dark-eyed and-haired, with a bewitching, piquant face; then the twins, Bertrand and Jerome, affectionately called Bert and Jerry; after them eight others, designated by the girls "the young ones," by the boys "the kids."

The Manor itself was a beautiful old place, the walls covered with ivy and all imaginable creepers. It stood in a large wilderness of a garden, where flowers and weeds struggled together for mastery, and only an occasional patch of ground testified to any care bestowed upon it.

These patches were sacred to the sisters. Bert

and Jerry also indulged in the gentle art, but as they raked up the seeds sown, on an average, twice a week, and uprooted the annuals to study the state of their health, they were not very successful.

Inside the house the poverty became apparent. Carpets had been mended until further mending was impossible, and then the girls had set heartily to work and stained the bare boards mahogany; whilst Mrs. Tremayne knitted rugs and curtains, to give a more home-like appearance to the place.

They had no luxuries, these young Tremaynes, but they were a happy, healthy lot, and they lived in an atmosphere of hope—papa was going to publish a wonderful book on conchology, which would bring him fame and wealth alike, and they quite forgot to remember he had been preparing it for six years now, and it was still a long—a very long way from being finished.

It was a wet morning in June. All the week the sky had been lowering; this morning the threatened rain began to fall, heavily, steadily. There was not a rift in the leaden sky, not the slightest indication of finer weather; and the younger Tremaynes, with their faces pressed against the windows, complained dolorously.

There was no getting out, and even if that were possible, mother had forbidden them to make mud pies. Jess, in an attitude of most unstudied grace, with her hands clasped behind her head, and her slender body moving rhythmically (she had secured the rocking-chair), was asking plaintively, "What are we to do to pass the morning?" Bert and Jerry were fighting for possession of the shabby old couch, whilst Psyche lay stretched at full length upon the hearth-rug, quite oblivious of the fact that her pretty feet and ankles were exposed to view. She was wearing a grey dress too short in the waist, too short in the sleeve, too short and too small everywhere, for it had been made long ago, and was not guiltless of sundry journeys to the wash-tub.

"Jerry, if you will whoop like an Apache,"

she said drowsily, "it will be my painful duty to box your ears."

A burst of laughter greeted her words.

"Would you like me to help you?" questioned Bert.

"No, thank you; the organs mentioned are quite visible to the naked eye."

"That is *nasty*," broke in Jerry, who was rather sensitive as to the size of his ears. "I did not think you *could* be so mean, Psyche. Still, I've had my revenge beforehand—old Tudnam read the note you sent him yesterday, and, 'pon my word, he did not in the least know what the letters of your name spelled. 'It's awful kind,' says he, 'of miss, to send me a line on my birthday; but which miss is it? what's these here letters spell?' 'Fish,' I said—it's the French style'—"

"*Jerry!*"

"*Fish!*" echoed old Tudnam, "what do 'ee mean?" "That Miss Psyche, my sister, knows you're fond of trout, and has just written 'Fish' at the bottom, so that you may understand she will send you some for supper."

"*Jerry!* you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" cried Psyche indignantly. "What must the old man think of me?"

"That you are either an awful fibber or very forgetful."

"I won't speak to you for a whole day; you ought to be sent to Coventry."

"Can't be done, my dear; haven't cash enough amongst us to pay the fare."

Then Bert broke in placidly,—

"Don't worry, Sy; Tudnam had his trout—I saw to that. Now, what *shall* we do—ugh! the brute has got my end of the couch—"

"Oh, bother the couch!" cried Jess; "it won't ruin your constitution to sit on the floor. Suppose we each tell what we would do if we were rich. Of course we never shall be, but we can 'make believe,' as the children say. I'll start. If I were rich I should at once travel, and in such a magnificent style that I should be the envy of all other travellers. My equipage

should be superb, my dresses magnificent. I should patronize Worth only—and—and—" blushing rosily—"wher ver I went men should fall down and worship me—"

"Oh, they would do that fast enough if you were rich," remarked Bert sarcastically, but Jess went on unheeding. "I should not be in a hurry to choose a husband from among them, because one should always place a proper valuation on one's self—"

"Oh, you do that already—"

"Be quiet, Bert; you are positively brutal. When I did marry I should choose the handsomest, best-born, and nicest of them all, and he should remain my slave all his life long. Then, of course, I should be presented, and create a great sensation; everybody should be talking of the lovely Countess of this, or Duchess of that—"

"What rot!" broke in Jerry rudely, "give me something more substantial than—that—"

"The voice of the people," suggested Bert, patronisingly; "what would you do? You have nipped Jess's eloquence in the bud, let us hear you."

"Why—I should just go to town; every day I would have a jolly lunch in at some swell pastry-cook's, and every night I should attend a theatre; what are you cackling for?" as a roar of laughter greeted his words. "I said I wanted something substantial for my money, did I not?"

"I'm thinking you would get it in the form of dyspepsia," laughed Psyche; "now it's my turn. First of all I would have the Manor re-decorated and furnished, mother should have all the new gowns she could wear, father's book should be published, you two boys should go to Eton, and the small fry should have clever masters and governesses. Then supposing I were very, very rich I would build a home for poor children, real home where they would be happy and loved, not only cared for. For myself I would get a lovely store of new books and music, and a beautiful piano; then—well—after awhile of course I should get married (this naively), "because I do not think I should care to be an old maid—"

A voice nearly suffocated by sternly suppressed laughter, said—

"I beg your pardon, I wanted Mr. Tremayne; I must have misunderstood the servant's direction.—I thought that this was the room—"

Jess with her fair face crimson, but still preserving much of her sang froid answered,—

"You will find father in the study, the second door on the right," but the stranger, a tall, fair-faced young fellow of some twenty-four years hesitated; and whilst Psyche endeavoured to hide her self behind Bert, he spoke.

"I would not disturb Mr. Tremayne for worlds if he is busy. Don't you think, as we are to be neighbours, it would be a very kind act to ask me to share the fun?"

"Oh, you are young Sterling?" queried Bert with the most delightful assumption of patronage. "You came last night, how do you like the place?"

"Not very much at present, although it sounds barbarous to say so; but home isn't a familiar place to me. We have been absent some sixteen years—but—may I come in?" He looked at the girls; it was Jerry the irrepressible who replied for them,

"Oh, yes, we are jolly glad to see a fresh face; but you won't come often, we are so beastly poor—we don't entertain because we can't afford it."

Jess was crimson with mortification and scarcely replied when Bert, who was precocious for his sixteen years, duly introduced his sisters as Miss Tremayne and Miss Psyche.

The latter had now emerged from her hiding place; she was flushed and tumbled, and badly dressed, but Kenneth decided she was the prettiest little creature he had ever met, and took a seat beside her.

They were soon all at home together, and Kenneth was telling them of his life abroad, the marvellous sights he had seen, quite forgetting his errand was to Mr. Tremayne, until that gentleman himself appeared on the scene, and having with some effort mastered the fact that the young man before him was the boy of eight

years old, who had left home with his invalid father, he gave him a very cordial welcome.

"I heard of your arrival, and I intended to call upon your father to-day, but my book engrosses so much of my time. And how is my old friend Philip?"

"Sometimes better, sometimes worse," the young man answered, a shadow falling upon the brightness of his frank face. "There are days when he can even walk a little with the aid of his stick, then there are others when only to move his head gives him acute pain—unfortunately this is one of them."

The girls, who knew the sad story, looked sympathetic; sixteen years ago Mr. Philip Sterling, the richest landowner in Cromeshire, had been thrown in the hunting field and his spine so fatally injured that he was thenceforth a cripple and an invalid.

Doctors advised travel and foreign air, and although he scarcely dared believe he should ever stand upright again, he clung to the forlorn hope as drowning men cling to straws; until hope being dead, he turned his face towards home, saying—"Let me lay my bones with my forefathers; my boy, the old place will soon be yours now."

With his usual thoughtlessness, Mr. Tremayne invited Kenneth to remain for the mid-day dinner, an invitation which he gladly accepted saying—"I feel at liberty to do so, as Fabian Evremond (my friend) is with us, and my father can be the better spared me."

It rather dulled his healthy appetite though, when he heard Jerry say lugubriously to Psyche, "I say, isn't the pater an old blockhead; there won't be enough pudding to go round, and I am just ravenous."

"Oh, Jess and I are not going to have any, we can make up with bread and butter afterwards," the girl whispered back cheerfully, "you won't suffer."

CHAPTER II.

A LOVELY morning quite at the end of June; a cloudless sky, a soft, warm breeze just fluttering the budding limes; walking together in the garden, Jess and Mr. Evremond; seated under a sycamore Kenneth and Psyche.

Once or twice Fabian Evremond had glanced in the direction of the other couple, half as though he desired to join them.

He was tall and slender, handsome in a Velasquez style, and just sufficiently cynical to be interesting to a very young girl.

"Your sister is very beautiful," he said, speaking now with the honest enthusiasm, "doubtless because she is quite unconscious of the fact, and her quaint name suits her admirably."

"Does it not? Psyche is all soul; oh, we are all very dull and common-place beside her, as you will soon discover. She is our poet and musician too; I want you to hear her manipulate her violin. It isn't a very good one (wisely), and although it is very old we have not impudence enough to call it a Stradivarius; I don't suppose it cost very much when it was new, because not a soul beside Psyche can make it speak."

He looked curiously at her; he was unaccustomed to hearing the women he knew praise each other so generously.

"You love your sister?" he said.

She laughed with unmeasured scorn at the question.

"Why that is only natural, we are one flesh and blood. I suppose,"—tentatively—"you have neither brothers nor sisters, or you would not doubt such a fact."

"I am alone in the world but for my uncle, Lord Boyne."

"Oh, what heaps of fun you have missed! Why we are as poor as we are proud, and that is saying a great deal; but there is not one we would miss from the group;" then her pretty face shadowed "I—I hope you will not mind our meagre entertainments; you see, we think it best to be honest before being lavish—and—and some of our neighbours do not understand this."

"You need not fear that I shall range myself beside them; I am proud and glad to be admitted to the Manor on such a friendly footing. Miss

Tremayne, shall we join your sister and Kenneth now?"

"Certainly," and to young Sterling's disgust they immediately did so.

A slight flush rose to Psyche's cheek as Fabian sat down beside her, and a very close observer might have seen that her composure was a little shaken.

"It is really too bad," the young man said (fixing his dark eyes upon her) "to leave Miss Tremayne the awful task of amusing me. She has been most kind, has closed her eyes persistently to my short comings, but I could see that she was wearied."

"Only with the heat," said Jess, frankly. "I like talking to you; you are so very interesting. I believe you have read all the books in Christendom."

"Oh, Miss Tremayne, I hardly deserve you should poke fun at me so mercilessly. But what can I do? I am powerless in your hands, and you know that Milton says, 'to be weak is to be miserable.'"

"For Heaven's sake don't quote Milton," laughed Kenneth; "I don't know him."

"Mr. Sterling, this is culpable wickedness," Psyche said, severely. "Do you ever read anything but comic literature?"

"Not often; I like to be amused. Oh! I am by no means an intellectual fellow; I leave all that sort of think to Fabian—he likes it."

"You must allow me to lend you some books," Evremond said, eagerly. "I make a point of adding all new productions of the best authors to my library. May I bring a parcel up to-morrow?"

"Oh, if you would! How very kind you are! I wish to-morrow had come!"

For the remainder of the morning he engrossed her attention. He was so much Kenneth's superior in intellect, so tactful and courteous, that Psyche was sorry when he rose to go, and throughout the day she thought a great deal more about him than was either necessary or wise.

"They are delightful girls," said Kenneth, as he and his friend walked up to The Red House on the cliff (commonly called The Red House). "You seem to admire Jess."

"She is pretty," the other answered, diplomatically, "and so is Miss Psyche."

"Oh, you Gosh! The idea of calling Psyche pretty! She is the loveliest, daintiest little creature under the sun. They are dining with us to-morrow, and I hope she will be at her best. I want the governor to make much of her."

"I supposed so," said Fabian, drily; "I guess how the land lies."

"With me, but not with her; I wish I could tell—there, old fellow, I'll make clean breast of it. I've been awfully fond of her ever since I saw her first. I did not tell you of that meeting, and forthwith he proceeded to do so, ending with Psyche's own words, "Of course I should get married, because I don't think I should care to be an old maid."

"She need have small fear of such a fate if you have your desire," Fabian said, quietly, and then they entered the hall together, the one to go straight to his father's room, the other to stand moodily before an open window in the library, thinking of Psyche and all her sweet ways, wishing, longing for her as the dying long for life.

The next day the Tremaynes walked over to The Red House. Mr. Sterling was stronger than usual, and manifested lively pleasure at the advent of his old friend's daughters. His eyes rested longer on Psyche, perhaps because he guessed from tones and looks of Kenneth's that he hoped to make her mistress of his home.

"My dear," he said, "you are very like your father; sit down by me and let us become well acquainted."

He leaned forward as he spoke, and one of his pillows slipped to the ground. Securing it, the girl rearranged his chair, and sitting down, said,—

"I made bold to bring my violin; Mr. Kenneth told me you loved music, and that alone is a bond between us."

"My dear, it will give me great pleasure to hear you;" and after dinner she played to them

weird, beautiful airs, with such skill and delicacy that Mr. Sterling said,—

"Tremayne, your daughter is a genius; really it is a shame to hide such talent under a bushel. My dear, who taught you to play like that?"

"A little old gentleman who used to walk over twice a week from Gobly; he was very poor for he had not many pupils, and though he was so clever very few ever heard of him outside the town. He was such an irascible little gentleman too, and I am afraid I took a mischievous delight in teasing him, yet I was his favourite pupil—he is dead now."

"It is a great pity you did not continue your studies."

"Oh, father could not afford me more lessons; of course, you know, we are awfully poor, and have to study ways and means before wishes," she said, with as blithe a laugh as though she had announced some unexpected piece of prosperity. "But we don't complain, we are happy and healthy; we love each other, and really some of the shifts we resort to are intensely comical."

This was frankness with a vengeance, and as amusing as it was novel. Looking from one sister to the other Mr. Stirling decided that either would make his boy a good wife. Both were rather more than pretty, both were delightfully honest and unconventional, with minds as healthy as their little, vigorous young bodies.

Tremayne had reason to be proud of his daughters; especially of Psyche—the musician of the family.

It fell to Fabian to escort her through the beautiful grounds and conservatories, and for awhile he was singularly silent.

A fierce love burned in his heart; seemed to consume him with its fervour—if he dared speak—if he but dared!

He had known her so short a time—what of that? It was ages to him since he saw and loved her—ages upon ages of torment and grief.

Kenneth, his friend, hoped to call her wife—what of that? If he could win her was she not his by right?

And then the dusky face grew ashen; into the black eyes leapt a look of wild despair; there was an obstacle in the way which he could not remove.

Surprised at his silence, Psyche lifted her limpid eyes to his, then with a touch of tender pity in her young voice said,—

"You are not well; the houses are too warm for you, let us go into the open," and she would have led the way; but he, sinking upon a seat gently drew her down beside him.

"Stay," he said, authoritatively, "it is nothing; let us remain here a little while. Why are you so anxious always to leave me?" and something in his voice made her tremble with vague, undefined emotion.

Almost unconsciously to herself her cheek had learned to flush, her eyes to kindle at his approach, and whilst she treated Kenneth with a sisterly frankness, she was always somewhat constrained with Fabian.

Now, as she sat toying with the blossoms he had gathered for her, he said in that strange, half-suppressed tone,—

"I have a happy knack of frightening those away whose good opinion and whose friendship I most prize—wherein lies the fault?"

"Oh, you must not think I was anxious to go; that is—I mean—I was only anxious you should get into a cooler atmosphere; I was afraid you were very ill—and as for frightening people away, you must be jesting. Mr. Kenneth is your most loyal friend—"

"He is the best fellow in the world, but he does not understand me; our tastes are as diverse as the poles. I am a very lonely fellow."

Now when a young and handsome man (Fabian was not yet thirty) begins to talk of himself in such a style, a tender-hearted girl is sure to pity him, and in nine cases out of ten the pity grows to love, so that Fabian was most distinctly taking an unfair advantage of the unsophisticated Psyche when he traded upon her compassion.

"I am very, very sorry," she said, gently, "but I am afraid I hardly understand your posi-

tion; loneliness at the Manor is unknown; there are so many of us, but not one that we could spare. Did you never have brother or sister?"

"Never."

"Oh, what a lot of good things you have missed! But your uncle, Lord Boyne, loves you, does he not—you are his heir!"

"It does not follow that there should be much affection between us; and he has never forgiven me one certain error I made when I was but a mere youth—barely twenty-one."

"Then he must be a perfectly horrid old man;

I am sure I should not like him. Why, we offend again and again, but never too often for father's and mother's forgiveness—it is easy (I suppose) to forgive when one loves."

The sweet young face was lifted to his; a mad desire to kiss the pretty lips possessed him, his breath came and went almost in gasps—for with Fabian Evremond passions were always in extremes, although few guessed or suspected this, being as a rule, so outwardly composed and self-contained—he leaned nearer.

"Miss Psyche—Psyche—I have no right to ask it, but will you give me a flower—not one of those," with a gesture indicating the blossoms he had gathered; "but the rose you wear. I want to keep it in memory of your kindness and patient endurance of my complaints; and when I look at it I shall hope that sometimes when I am gone you will think kindly of me."

With trembling hand she gave him the fading flower; he held the little tender fingers a moment in his—oh, what joy if he dared clasp and hold them his for ever—then stooping he kissed them once and released them; and up in his own room he muttered,—

"I am a black-hearted scoundrel. I have no right to teach her love's lesson—I who love her."

CHAPTER III

It was now the middle of July, and between The Red House and the Manor the intercourse was of the friendliest nature; presents of flowers and fruit were of daily occurrence, and always so delicately offered that not even the proud Tremaynes could decline them.

It was evident to all but Psyche herself, that Kenneth was her most devoted admirer; if her thoughts had not been so much engrossed she too must have seen this; but Mrs. Tremayne had forbidden any of the tribe to "chaff" her (as Jerome elegantly expressed it) about her lover. She did not wish the girl's decision to be influenced in any way, for Psyche was quite capable of sacrificing herself for the good of her dear ones, should the need arise.

"And if my girl marry," said the gentle lady, "I wish them to marry simply and solely for love. We are very poor, Gustavus, but we have always been very happy together;" and Mr. Tremayne, without lifting his eyes from his manuscript made answer.

"The girls are mere babies yet my dear; and it will be a sorry day for me when one of them leaves the old home."

So Psyche drifted with the stream, little recking whither it bore her; only she knew that it depended wholly upon Fabian to make her days happy. If he did not come, her heart grew heavy with the thought—

"It is only vanity that makes me think he likes being with me. Why should he, I am so very stupid," or if he came with Kenneth, and his dark mood was upon him, she would torture herself with the question: "Have I made him angry? Is there somebody else of whom he thinks? Oh, if I knew, if I only knew!"

And then so great was her fear that he should guess her secret, that she would be cold and capricious until Jess wondered and scolded, for not even to Jess could she tell the truth.

There were times when Fabian did not come to the Manor for three or four days, and then Psyche would cover her dismay and pain by an excess of hilarity which deceived all around her. It was after such a prolonged absence (for indeed to her the days appeared as weeks) that he walked in the gloaming alone in the direction of her home.

Kenneth was away at Ledgerton, the nearest town, and Fabian had not even the hope of meeting Psyche—it was a shock to him to see her standing by the gate, under the mountain ash, whose drooping branches hung so low that the changing berries almost kissed the dark tresses. She had neither seen nor heard him, her head was averted, but something in her attitude was so expressive of despair and grief, that he stole a little nearer, longing with all his heart to offer her some solid comfort.

The rustling of his feet in the long ripe grass startled her; she turned swiftly, and then he saw there were tears upon the pale cheeks, in the dark, soft eyes—he wondered were they shed for him? and his heart beat faster. He had read the girl's nature better than those who had known her all her life; he knew that it was his coming, not Kenneth's, for which she longed, and a fierce joy possessed him. Before she could remove all traces of those tell-tale tears, he had taken possession of her hands and was looking with burning eyes into the sweet, quivering face.

"Psyche," he said, "why were you crying?"
"I was not crying," mendaciously, "I—I never do."

"There are tears on you lashes now; won't you make me your confessor, you never could have a more lenient one. Try me."

She snatched her hands from his clasp.

"I have nothing to confess!" but the little sob which lifted her slender throat gave the lie direct to her words.

He opened the gate and stood beside her; he forgot all but his love for and his need of her; he threw all memory of the past to the winds—"he would possess her or would die."

If she would give herself to him she should never regret it; he would encompass her life with all good things—so he cast aside the shreds of honour to which he had long clung, and taking her in his arms he kissed her passionately again and yet again before he could find space for speech. Even then, in that awful transport of joy he did not know what words he uttered; he only felt that she was in his embrace, unresisting, breathless, wordless with this wonderful joy which had come to her.

At last he spoke.

"Tell me you love me, Psyche; say it over and over again that I may realise the truth. Oh, my darling! my darling! once I thought never to call you my own—but the obstacle between us is gone."

Ah, yes! the obstacle had been a certain dim sense of honour—and he had struggled with and mastered it; "give me your hands more, sweet-heart, and say 'I will belong to you and you only, Fabian, all my life,'" and like a child, in low and faltering tones she repeated his words.

Ah! the sweetness of this summer night with its starry sky and cool, fragrant breeze. Oh, the scent of the overhanging limes! would she not always sicken at the odour in the days to come! Now, ah, now! she was in Love's Paradise. "Time was not, and all the world stood still," to witness her great joy.

In silence they stood together until twilight was fast deepening into darkness, and then Psyche said with a sigh of regret,

"I must be going; but we shall meet tomorrow, please do not keep me longer now. I—I don't want the others to guess—not to-night—I want my happiness to myself."

The dark face above hers flushed duskily,—

"Psyche, I am going to ask a hard thing of you, to put your love to the test at the very outset. I want you to say nothing of our engagement to any one, until I give permission."

"Why?" she said naively. "I never had a secret from mother or Jess in my life; why may I not tell them what they soon must learn?"

"They must not learn it yet, for that would mean separation for us. Let me explain; my uncle has chosen my wife for me, and expects me to fall in with his wishes. Very well, I have yet to convert him to my opinion, that there is only one girl in all the world for me; if I told him suddenly he would at once disown me, and I have no private means, and no profession. Then too, your father's pride would be up in arms when he

heard Lord Boyne's decision, and he would forbid our correspondence. In face of these things is your silence too much to ask? Oh, little sweet-heart, having won how can I bear to lose you? It is only for a short time—cannot you trust me, Psyche?"

"Oh yes, yes, I do with all my heart. Let it be as you wish, but I hope the time will soon come when I may confide in mother; I hate to deceive her, because as I trust you, she believes in me."

She did not feel so glad as she should have done when she went back to the house; candour was a very prominent characteristic of the young Tremaynes', deceit of any kind was abhorrent to them, and Psyche felt very guilty as she received her mother's goodnight kiss, and heard the softly uttered—

"God bless you."

But it was Fabian's wish, and his wishes must in future govern all her actions, and "mother would forgive" when he dared openly ask for her hand.

In the meanwhile Fabian Evremond, looking anything but the newly accepted suitor, went moodily towards The Red House.

"What have I done! What have I done?" he muttered, heavily. "I am a fool and a knave. What will she say, if ever the truth is revealed, will she loathe and leave me, my beautiful darling? Ah! better for her and for me had we never met! I could not lose her now and live; I am false in all but my love for her, and that Heaven knows is true—nothing shall make me yield up the treasure I have won—and I will live down my remorse."

After this came those bitter-sweet meetings; sweet because with all her innocent heart Psyche loved Fabian; bitter to her because of their clandestine nature.

Her mother watching her wondered at the change in her; she had never been variable in her moods, but now indeed they were as many as those of the typical April day.

She was not nearly so frank with Kenneth, but this fact made him more hopeful; the constraint arising from her deception was construed by him into new-born timidity, and in his heart he humbly hoped that she was learning to love him.

He spoke often of her to Fabian, who listened in guilty, miserable silence; his friendship for Kenneth was very real and deep, despite the treachery he had used; but he thought to himself,—

"He will soon recover his disappointment; he is not a fellow to fall very seriously into love; it maybe Jess will catch his heart in the rebound;" for despite his affection he had no real knowledge of Kenneth's true nature.

He did not understand, what a very deep root love had in the loyal heart; perhaps the very frankness and geniality of the other seemed to be token of a shallow character.

Kenneth was English through and through; too proud to wear his heart upon his sleeve; gay with the gaiety of a young, healthy, happy man, yet capable of deep, life-lasting love; in the words of a gentle poetess, his heart was a "rich rough gem," and this he laid at Pysche Tremayne's feet.

She might spurn the offering, she might look coldly even scornfully upon it, but he could never take it back again; it was hers for life, hers until death stilled its strong and steady beat; nothing could ever alienate it from her, and alas! she did not even guess he cared for her.

It was a terrible shock to her when one evening, he, finding her alone, told all that he had so long wished to tell, and there were tears in the dusky eyes uplifted to his.

"Oh, Ken! I did not guess. We have all along regarded you as a brother. Oh, yes, I do like you very, very much, but what you ask cannot be."

"If you like 'me very, very much,' why cannot it be? From liking, love would grow."

He did not understand her distressed look as she shook her head.

"It never could; please try to forget."

"It would be so easy to forget you," he an-

swered, scornfully; "why Psyche, you are part of my life. There is nothing I do, nothing I plan but that I say to myself, 'Will she approve? Will it make her happier? I don't want to hurry you, darling—you are so young—but if you will let me hope."

"No, no; I cannot even bid you hope. Ken, dear Ken, won't you be content to take my friendship? it is all I can give, all I ever shall be able to give," and then, because she was very young and very pitiful she began to cry, and her tears made him strong to bear his pain.

He took the slender little hands in his with a gesture infinitely tender.

"Don't fret, dear heart," he said, gently. "I am not a coward I think, and I shall know how to bear my disappointment. Then too, I do not despair; I feel certain one day you will uneasy the words you have just spoken, and I shall wait for that good time."

She bowed her face upon his shoulder, sobbing bitterly because she felt that what it would be for her to lose Fabian, her loss was to him.

And he let her grief have way, smoothing the ruffled hair with gentlest touch, until presently she looked up to say,—

"If you would only be angry with me I could bear it better," and although his face was haggard and white he answered, cheerfully,—

"Angry with you, because you have punished my presumption as it deserved! I am not quite so unreasonable. But kiss me once for my love's sake, and then I will speak no more of love to you, until your eyes and your voice bid me hope."

* * * * *

"Oh mother," sobbed Psyche later, "I am very miserable, for I have trampled on a heart of gold."

CHAPTER IV.

"I AM leaving here to-morrow," Fabian said, as he loitered with Psyche in the forlorn churchyard. "Ken and his father are off to Rome, as you doubtless know, and I—well—it depends on you whether I remain in England or no."

"On me? Oh Fabian, as if you did not know I want you to stay. What shall I do when you are gone? Oh, how hard it is to say goodbye."

"Goodbye need never be said between us, if you will do as I wish. Psyche, I think you love and trust me fully."

"You can have no doubt of that," she answered, under her breath, "for no one else would deceive my dear ones; you should love me very much in return—I have done wrong for your sake."

"I do; so much that I cannot bear to leave you behind. My darling, my little, winsome darling, when I go from Redruff let me take my wife with me. We will go to town and be married without delay; when it is all over your people and Lord Boyne must forgive what cannot be altered—if not—I shall still have you."

He pressed his burning lips to her brow and kissed her many times, whilst she, all trembling and afraid, tried hard to be angry with him for suggesting such a line of conduct.

At last in a weak small voice, she said,—

"Fabian, it is too much; I cannot do it. My father would never forgive me, my mother would break her heart over my flight; oh!" with a wild burst of tears, "do not urge me."

"If you put it that way I cannot," he said, coldly, as he released her; "of course if your people are more to you than I am, you do well to remain with them; but this is not the love I thought was mine."

She was half-distracted between her affection for her parents, her duty to them, and the wild devotion she paid Fabian; and he was quick to see this.

What arguments he used, what sophistry he brought to bear upon their particular case it matters little now, in the end he was triumphant; with a cry of pain the poor child flung herself upon his breast.

"It must be as you wish; I know no will but

yours; and oh, may Heaven forgive me that I hurt my mother so sorely."

In a very short time he had made her acquainted with his plans, they were extremely simple, and with a heavy heart Psyche promised to obey them implicitly.

Then came the parting—"almost our last goodbye," said Fabian, as he kissed the tremulous lips, before reluctantly releasing her, and he went back to The Red House in a triumphant mood.

"Conscience! Remorse!" He thrust them away! To-night he would be glad; the prize was his, and oh! how he would cherish it. Not a cloud should dim the brightness of her sky, not a grief oppress the tender, trustful heart so filled with love for him.

Once a prayer rose to his lips for her, but he dared not utter it, and with a groan he said,—

"If only for her sake I could undo the past, what a happy fellow I should be. Psyche, my dear love, may you never know me as I am."

Psyche had bidden her parents good-night. She looked so white and ill that Mrs. Tremayne asked anxiously,—

"Are not you well, dear?"

And she answered,—

"Quite well, mother;" and as if to prove it, burst into hysterical weeping, clinging about her mother's neck with fond hands, lothe to be unclasped. "Oh, you must not notice me, I am only very foolish. To-morrow I shall be myself again; but mother, dear mother, will you always love me as you do now?"

"Always!" soothingly, whilst she determined to morrow to consult a medical man concerning the girl, who had been so unstrung of late.

"Would you even if I grieved you, or did something which made it seem I did not care for you; and oh! I do, indeed I do!"

"You are talking, wildly, Psyche, but I will answer you. Don't you think the father of whom we read loved his prodigal son the more because he had hurt him so often, and stood in such sore need of pardon and love; and can you suppose that my heart would grow cold to my child because she had not always been a good or dutiful daughter? Ah, Psyche, you cannot understand a mother's love if you believe it can fail."

The girl lifted her white face from Mrs. Tremayne's bosom and kissed her solemnly.

"I shall like to remember your words always dear," she said, "no trouble will be too heavy whilst they ring in my ears;" and then she went upstairs to the room she shared with Jess.

"Gustavus," said Mrs. Tremayne, anxiously, "I am afraid all is not well with Psyche;" and then she recounted what had passed between them, keeping nothing back.

He, tossing the grey hair back from his brow, answered,—

"My dear, aren't you alarming yourself unnecessarily. Psyche is at a very hysterical age, and perhaps the little affair between her and Kenneth does not prosper."

"Ken! I wish I could think she liked Ken; but I am afraid Fabian Evremond is far more to her than he will ever be. Really, Gustavus, you are very rude to laugh so incredulously."

"My dear, I am not laughing; but Evremond pays her no more attention than he does Jess."

"But he looks at her differently. We women are quick to notice signs and glances."

Mr. Tremayne was still smiling.

"After all the child may simply be suffering from a less romantic complaint than love—it may be indigestion. Better send for Protheroe, and let him prescribe for her. No, I am not unfeeling; but I won't have you worrying yourself ill."

Two or three times in the night Jess was half-awakened by a stifled sob. Once she stretched out her hand in sleepy fashion to her sister, murmuring,—

"Don't cry, Sy, there's a darling," and again lapsed into unconsciousness. Then came morning bright and beautiful.

Jess knelt to say her prayers; but Psyche dared not pray. She went down miserably to breakfast. Afterwards they remembered she ate nothing,

and that her eyes burned like live coals from out the whiteness of her face.

At ten o'clock Ken and his father drove by on their way to the station, Fabian had left an hour earlier, ostensibly to go to Leeds, really to proceed twelve miles down the line, and there to wait for Psyche to join him.

At eleven-thirty the wretched girl left home, carrying nothing with her lest suspicion should be aroused.

She took a ticket for Laverbridge, and there Fabian met her. He was flushed and excited, she so trembling and pale that he feared she would faint; and her eyes wandered in a terrified way up and down the platform as though she expected to see some one who knew her, and would carry the story of her flight to her people, for above all Fabian had enjoined her to keep utter silence with regard to himself until the time was ripe for disclosure.

From Laverbridge they travelled to King's Cross, he doing his best to soothe and cheer her.

"It will all come right," he said, drawing her close to him. "You have only to trust me, and be patient, sweetheart. As soon as we reach town I shall take you to a Mrs. Cooke, a very decent body, who was once servant to my uncle. You will remain with her until we can get married, and then we will go abroad at once. I feel I am asking a great deal of you, but you shall not regret your sacrifice. My whole life shall be spent in trying to make you happy."

But she was very disconsolate as she thought of the dear, shabby old home, and realised that it might be months or even years before she met all that laughing, romping crew of brothers and sisters; and of her mother she dared not think at all.

At Finsbury Park they had to wait ten minutes, and Fabian alighted to get her refreshments. She leaned out of the window to say,—

"You will post this letter for me, it is to my mother; but it tells her nothing you would not have her know. Oh, Fabian, you won't refuse me this little favour?"

He could not withstand her beseeching look.

"It is very foolish, and may furnish a clue to our whereabouts; but, to please you, it shall go;" and then he walked rapidly towards the refreshment-rooms.

A lady in the adjoining compartment, who had been listening to their low-toned conversation, looked after him as went, and the delicate pink faded from her face.

Quick as thought she stepped out upon the platform, and looking in at Psyche, said,—

"You will forgive me if I seem impudent; but I know Fabian Evremond, and I overheard your words. You are young, you *look* good; tell me why you have left your home for his sake?"

She spoke imperiously, and Psyche, who was too frightened by all that had gone before to have any courage left at all, answered,—

"I am going with him to be his wife!"

The other started.

"Has he promised to make you *that*?"

"Yes, why else should I have left home?" the girl answered, innocently.

"Oh, you poor child, you never can be that while I live. I am his lawful wife, and if you value name and happiness you will return to your friends."

"Oh, I cannot, I dare not! They are very proud; they never can forgive me; and, and oh, it is not true! I will not believe you! he never could be so wicked."

"Come with me until you have had time to learn for yourself that I do not lie. Write to Lord Boyne for information, his word will satisfy you."

She spoke with such perfect good faith that Psyche's heart failed her. She sprang out of the carriage, her face wild and white. The other caught her hand.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. What can I do but drown myself? I have disgraced my family. I dare not go back. I have not a friend in the world, and no money."

"You shall come with me! Hurry—he is not yet in view—come, for your mother's sake, I will

help you!" and allowing no time for remonstrance even if remonstrance were possible in Psyche's state, she half led, half dragged her towards the cab rank.

There, thrusting her into the first vehicle, she gave some hurried directions to the driver, and they were whirled away just as Fabian issued from the refreshment-room.

The stranger saw him and her face grew pale and rigid; but she turned with a half-caressing gesture to her companion only to find she had swooned.

Meanwhile, Fabian had reached the compartment he had occupied with Psyche, to find it empty! He looked blankly round. Nowhere could he see the slender girlish figure, the sweet oval face, with its large dark eyes. She had vanished as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed her up.

Distractedly he inquired of officials if they had seen her, but, as neither Psyche nor her companion were burthened with luggage, they had been but little noticed.

He learned at the cab-rank that two ladies, one dark, the other fair, had been driven from the station, and that was all he could learn. For when he had discovered the cabman, he protested utter inability to remember two fares among so many.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried in his wrung heart; "where is she? Was she frightened at the very last? Did she love me so little? Where is she, my Psyche, my dear little Psyche? Has she gone home?—at least, I can ascertain that."

And at The Manoy a mother was weeping over an ill-written letter, blotted with tears, and a father's head was brought low with grief, and dread of what might be, for this is what Psyche had written,—

"My darlings, I am going away with one who loves me, and with all my heavy heart I pray you to forgive me. I may not even tell you his name now, but one day he will bring me back to you his happy, honoured wife. I could not leave you all without good-bye. I am broken-hearted when I think of your anger, which I know I deserve. Jess will be a better daughter to you than I have ever been. Try to think as little harshly of me as you can, for, indeed, I love you all; but he needs me, and I must go. Always your loving

PSYCHE.

"Who is he?" asked Mr. Tremayne hoarsely. "Oh, wife! wife! who has stolen our girl?"

"Fabian Evremond," said Jess fiercely. "If I meet him I will kill him."

CHAPTER V.

REMEMBERING his wife's words, Mr. Tremayne asked quickly,—

"What makes you accuse Mr. Evremond? Are you aware of any understanding between him and your sister?"

"No; but you will not easily shake my opinion. I have long seen that his will was her law, that if he commanded her gown, or some way of dressing her hair, she always wore the gown he approved when next he came, and used the same style of coiffure."

"But why, if he be the man, did he not approach her honourably? She is of birth equal to his own. There is nothing but poverty to be urged against her."

"Well, poverty is a crime," retorted Jess, whose sweet disposition seemed suddenly warped and embittered, "*the very worst of crimes*. But don't let us stand idling here; we must act, and every hour makes it more difficult to trace her. I suppose nothing further can be done to-night than inquire at the station by what train Psyche left, and for what place she took her ticket. Father, you stay behind to comfort mother; Bert will walk with me to Mr. Brownlow's; and she had her way."

It was a long journey to the station—to Jess, in her grief and rage, it seemed never-ending, and Bert was the dullest of companions, only

speaking once in lowered tones, and with frowning brows.

"There'll be an awful scandal, and everybody will have something to say about her. I hope she never will return; I don't want to see her face any more—"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I don't care what she has done; she is still our sister, and you can't get away from that fact. Of course, it isn't pleasant to have an elopement in the family, but you must not judge Psyche by ordinary rules. You know that when she loves, she does it in a way you can't understand."

"A little while ago you said you would kill Evremond if you met him."

"It is a woman's privilege to change her mind, and I have changed mine. If he makes Psyche happy, that is everything; if he does not—"

"Is it likely he will?" interrupted Bert. "If he had not been ashamed of the alliance, would he wish to marry in such a hole-and-corner way?" and he said no more until they interviewed Mr. Brownlow, the station-master.

Yes, Miss Psyche had taken a ticket to Laverbridge, she was quite alone; and Jess, seeing his wondering look, said mendaciously,—

"She left home to go to Goby" (a place three miles nearer than Laverbridge), "but the last train is in, and she has not returned; so we concluded she had gone on further, as we have friends there. She cannot get back, I suppose, to-night, Mr. Brownlow?"

"Not unless her friends drive her over, miss; but she can be here by nine-thirty to-morrow morning."

"Thank you;" and she made a feint of moving away, only, however, to return, and forcing her pale lips to smile, she said,—

"We shall be very dull, now that The Red House is empty again—"

"Indeed, yes, miss. There was Mr. Evremond—you knew him!—he went to London at nine, and Mr. Sterling and his son left an hour later. It is a pity the old gentleman must spend so much time abroad."

"A very great pity; but his health demands it. Good-night, and thank you."

"Now," said Bert, when they were out of earshot, "who does Psyche know at Laverbridge? or did she only take her ticket there to mislead us?"

"She must have done so, because her letter bears the postmark 'Finsbury Park'; so she evidently changed her route on reaching Laverbridge. Oh, dear, if she had but trusted us more!" and poor Jess fairly broke down; whilst Bert said savagely,—

"Don't make a fool of yourself; some one may pass and recognize us. It is pretty evident to me that she is with Evremond; he, too, has gone to town."

"That is only circumstantial evidence," snapped Jess, who was hurt by his tone. "I would not rely upon it if I were you."

It was very evident that nothing further could be done that night; but in the morning Mr. Tremayne telegraphed to Lord Boyne for his nephew's address, and it was duly wired to him.

Then he went to town, refusing to allow either Mrs. Tremayne or Jess to accompany him.

"You will be kind to her?" sobbed the poor mother. "You will tell her we will freely forgive her conduct? And if already they are married, you will not be too harsh with him? because it might make matters worse for our child. Oh, Gustavus, I wish we were going with you."

"You are best at home; and I promise to remember that Psyche is my daughter. I cannot swear that I shall be lenient to Evremond. Good-bye."

Reaching town, he went at once to Fabian's chambers, and found him in.

He looked very white and haggard, but his pale face flushed as his visitor entered, and his voice was constrained as he gave him welcome.

"Mr. Evremond," said Mr. Tremayne, "where is my daughter? She left her home yesterday for some man's sake; we believe you to be that man."

A sigh of relief broke from the other's lips, as

he said, with every appearance of astonishment.

"I do not understand you. What have I to do with Miss Tremayne's disappearance? This is unaccountable."

"Are you lying to me? Will you swear that Psyche is not with you?"

"Psyche! I thought you meant her sister. Why, all the county knows that she and Kenneth Sterling are all but acknowledged lovers."

"She never cared for him; I wish to Heaven she had, then this grief and disgrace had not befallen us. On your honour, Fabian Evremond, are you guilty of wresting her from us? I am willing to take her back, unless, indeed, you are prepared openly to make her your wife. Tell me, where is my child?"

"On my honour, I do not know; I wish that I did—but I never had the least idea of becoming your son-in-law. I am afraid it was only natural that you should suspect me, I was so frequently at the Manor; and, like yourself, I believed Ken and I were the only male visitors you received. Mr. Tremayne, you must let me try to help you in your search."

Mr. Tremayne wrung his hand gratefully. If only he could have known the truth, he would have felled him like an ox to the earth; instead, he poured out passionate thanks, and could not sufficiently apologize for the charge he had brought against him.

They parted with mutual good wishes, and the young man being alone paced his room agitatedly muttering to himself,—

"Where is she? Great Heaven, if she has gone to her death, what then am I? Psyche, Psyche, I am a coward and a scoundrel, I dare not even confess my sin against you. Further and further I plunge into the slough of vice, and there is no help for me. I would do wrong again but to call you mine—and risk what followed—oh, this is worse than death, so nearly to have won you, and yet have lost you."

Still there was some satisfaction in the thought that he had escaped detection at present because he knew that for him detection meant social ruin, the loss of all that he coveted; and he yet hoped to find Psyche and bring her to reason.

He felt convinced that she would not return home, that she was still in town, and up to this time, she had not divulged his name. As he thought thus, a note was brought in to him; the handwriting was hers; with trembling fingers he tore it open. Of course she had relented, had overcome her very natural fears and was going to make him happy. Was she? Not if one might judge from his stricken face as he read.

MR. EVREMOND.—

"I cannot tell you with what feelings I now regard you, or how I loathe myself that I suffered you to make me false to myself and my parents. I hope that we may never meet again, lest I should forget that I ever dreamed I loved you and say all the bitter thoughts crowding in my brain. When you left me to get refreshments yesterday, a lady joined me; she said she was your wife! That she filled the place I thought so soon was to be mine."

"So I left you. I dare not go home with this burthen of disgrace upon me. I have no friends. Heaven only knows what the future may have in store for me—I will try to forgive you, even though you have made me homeless, friendless, a byword in the county where the Tremaynes have always held their heads so high. If I alone could suffer that would be justice, but the world is cruel and my shame will be visited upon my sisters. Oh, Heaven forgive you. I find it too hard; my heart and my spirit are broken, and the ruin of my life lies at your door."

PSYCHE TREMAYNE."

He dropped the letter as though it burned him, and casting his arms out before him, buried his face upon them, and burst into the hoarse, terrible sobs of manhood. It had been hard to lose her; but it was infinitely worse to feel that she knew him through and through, just as he was; that his black sin was in her possession.

He had loved her as never in his life had he

loved before; he had fully intended to marry her, although the ceremony would be but a mock one; then he would have taken her away, and together they would have lived the happy, unthinking life of children, until the obstacle to their union was removed.

He had hoped, he had almost dared importune Heaven to take away the woman he had loved long ago with all a very young man's ardour—she had stood long enough between him and happiness; in his heart he hated her now because she had wrested Psyche from him at the last hour, and snatched her back from the precipice upon which she stood.

He cursed her as he grovelled there; he groaned out Psyche's name coupled with every endearing epithet; he prayed her wildly to return, he could not endure life without her—and she hated him. Where was she now? What could she do in all that great cruel city, alone, penniless, friendless?

He started up, and, all unconsciously, his feet led him towards the river; was she lying there under the leaden waters, her eyes awfully staring, and her loving heart stilled for ever? Was he her murderer? So wildly he looked that passers by glanced after him and shook their heads; he neither heeded nor cared; he heard but one voice calling—

"Psyche! Psyche!"—he saw but one face, the dead, white face of the girl he loved and had wronged.

When night came he had learned nothing; he had engaged the most able detective of the day to assist him in his search, but he had not much hope of success, and he reeled as a drunken man as he entered his chambers, to fling himself down upon a couch and fall asleep through very weariness, and in his sleep what terrible dreams came to torture him; again and again he saw the dead face of his little love, and knew that he had slain her, that she had died cursing him, and died by her own act!

He woke cold and trembling, with great drops of sweat upon his brow, and his heart throbbing audibly. Towards morning he fell again into a troubled sleep from which he did not wake until noon. As he opened his heavy eyes and turned wearily upon his bed, he little guessed that Psyche was within half an hour's walk of him, or that his wronged wife had given her generous shelter.

They were together now; the tall, beautiful woman, the white and terrified girl. It was in a pretty house close to Hyde Park, and the surroundings were not only dainty but costly, giving unmistakable evidence of wealth. In the centre of the room stood Madame Allix, looking handsomer than ever in her *negligée* gown of green and gold. She was tall, stately, with a mass of pale, gold hair, deep grey eyes and a most beautiful complexion which owed nothing of its beauty to art.

Her eyes were very kind as they rested on the shrinking, desolate little figure upon the couch, and her voice was gentle even to tenderness.

"My dear child, it is necessary you should know my story; you were too ill to hear it yesterday, but for your sake I am now going to speak of the past, which I hoped was buried for ever. And then we will talk of your future and try to see what is best for you."

She sat down by Psyche and with an arm about her waist, said,—

"Dear, I was very little older than you when Fabian Evremond came into my life to blight it; to change a laughing happy girl into a wretched, suspicious and bitter woman. I thought then my heart would break; but hearts are not easily broken, and I lived on against my will."

CHAPTER VI.

"UNLIKE you, I was not born a lady; I am afraid that my people were not even very respectable. I know they were illiterate. My father was the comic man at a music hall, my mother sometimes undertook small parts, and, because I was pretty it was intended I should follow in their steps. They gave me some sort of education,

and the pianist, who was really very clever, trained my voice. But when I was barely twelve I had a serious illness which left me perfectly useless as a vocalist, and whilst my parents were in despair, my friend the pianist again came to my aid.

"He discovered that I had great musical ability (the world is pleased now to call it genius) and he resolved I should turn it to account. Never did a pupil have a kinder master, never did a master have a pupil who loved her art better than I did.

"He was not a good man, in fact his friends had cast him off because of his disreputable habits—but I can only remember him with regretful affection. When I was just seventeen he died, and the proprietor of the hall offered me the situation made vacant by his death. I gladly accepted it; you see, all my life I had been accustomed to the place and the sort of people who frequent it, and I felt no shrinking from the prospect before me.

"Six months later I found myself an orphan, but well provided for according to my then notions, and I had no fear of the future.

"Then there came the turning point in my life; one night the proprietor brought a gentleman to me—he was quite young, not more than twenty—for all this happened ten years ago—and a glance told me that he was of a different order to the other men who had begged for introductions—the gentleman was Fabian Evremond, and as he bowed over my hand, he whispered that he had seen me in the street, and followed me in the hope of getting to know me. I cannot tell you much of that night, it all seems like a dream to me after this lapse of time; but in a short time he filled all my life; I had no will but his, I worshipped him with my whole heart. It seemed impossible to me that he could love me, and yet he vowed that I was more than all beside to him—and I lived in a Paradise which never had any real existence. I would be worthy him, I thought, and secretly I took lessons in all things necessary for his wife to know, for I felt he must never learn to be ashamed of his choice.

"Six months after our first meeting we were married, quite secretly, and I made no demur. He had told me that he dare not confess the truth to his uncle, and I was content to let things be as he chose.

"I left the music-hall, but I still continued my studies and in the little home he had furnished for me at Brixton, I worked hard at my profession.

"He had often to leave me, and although I missed him sorely I had no time for regret, because every hour was filled with work.

"We had been married a year, and Fabian was with Lord Boyne—who had been complaining of his nephew's frequent absence from home—when my baby was born, and my life was in jeopardy.

"A mutual friend wrote to Fabian of my danger, and he hurried at once to me, for you see he loved me then.

"In his haste to reach me he had left some papers loose about his room, amongst them the letter which called him to my side, and that fell into Lord Boyne's hands.

"He believed that Fabian was embroiled in some awful intrigue. He never suspected that I was his lawful wife—I know now that even our mutual friend was ignorant of that fact—and he was furious.

"But he made no sign until my baby died and buried, myself convalescent, he suddenly swooped down upon us, and then the truth was made clear.

"His fury was terrible to witness. He threatened to disown Fabian, to leave him utterly to his own resources, and he treated me with fine disregard for my feelings, calling me a low-born adventress, and sundry other names, more or less unsavory.

"My husband heard it all, and then began to plead for mercy (I would have died rather than have humbled myself to the haughty old aristocrat); and in the end he was offered an alternative. If he would still retain his position as heir to the Boyne title and estates he must agree to

leave me at once and for ever ; to keep our marriage a secret, and so long as I did the same I should receive a handsome allowance.

"I looked into my husband's face, and I realised my doom was sealed. He made a feeble protest, but he loved wealth and ease better than he loved me, and he consented.

"Then for the first time I saw what manner of man I had married ; and, although I could not hate I despised him.

"I stood up before them both, accepting my fate without complaint or tears ; but when Lord Boyne began to speak of settlements I turned like a tigress upon him. 'I will not touch one farthing of your money,' I said, vehemently, 'if I cannot work I can starve. He has taken all that was good from my life, he has broken my heart, and now deserts me—my spirit he shall not break. Fabian, good-bye, if you dare ask forgiveness for this foul wrong ask it of Heaven, if Heaven will hear you.'

"He looked entreatingly at me. 'You do not understand,' he said, lamely, 'my position is a most peculiar one ; but at least you will not doubt that I love you, and only fate drives me from your side.'

"*Fate !* I cried, laughing, 'say rather you are weary of me, that you never really loved me. But that you are the father of my child I could kill you.' Then I left them, and neither dared to follow me.

"Before an hour had gone I had turned my back upon the home where we had been so happy, and I went to the great maestro who had been instructing me.

"Right nobly he helped me, right generously his wife gave me shelter, who then was shelterless, and in a little while I appeared in public as Madame Fedora Allix—Allix was my mother's maiden name—and I was pronounced an immediate success.

"Once and once only have I met Fabian face to face since we parted, and that was at Scarborough. I was so startled that I paused and spoke his name. He glanced at me with bitter contempt, and passed me by. Oh, it was hard ; but I would not brood upon my troubles, and Heaven knows how rigid was the life I led. No cruelty of his could make me less his wife ; and, low-born though I was, I would prove myself worthy the name he had given me. Always in my mind there lingered Lord Boyne's words, 'You will be glad later on that the world did not receive her as your wife. Give her time and liberty, and by her own acts she will set you free, as such women always do,' never ; her eyes flashing with indignation, 'never shall he triumph over me, at least I will do what now he never can, preserve my honour intact. That is nearly all the story. I have only to add that he does not even guess my identity with Madame Allix. I have as yet escaped discovery, because I very rarely perform in England. And now, dear child, let me beg of you to return to your friends. I will tell them all they need to know.'

"Oh, I dare not ; you cannot guess how proud they are of our hitherto stainless name. Why, it is a proverb in the county, 'As proud as a Tremayne !' Dearly as they loved me once they would close their doors upon me now. It was bad enough that I should steal away to be clandestinely married, but it would be worse a thousand times to return to them still Psyche Tremayne. Oh, you must not urge that upon me ; and cruelly as Mr. Evermond has treated me, I do not wish to ruin all his prospects ; if Lord Boyne disinherited him what could he do ?"

"Oh, what fools we women are ! " cried Fedora, impatiently. "We cast our hearts under the feet of those who neither deserve nor treasure the gift, and when we can no longer love we still sacrifice ourselves, because once we held this or that creature dear. Psyche, if you don't go home what will you do ?"

"I don't know, I have thought of the river," with a quick shudder. "If I were dead they would forgive me at home."

"But you are not going to die, rather you shall live and be happy. A common grief should make us friends. Will you stay with me, dear ?"

"Oh, Madame Allix, you cannot mean this ! " "But I do. You shall remain with me until

you are brave enough to return to those, who I am sure are sorrowing for you now, and remember that I am no longer Madame Allix, but Fedora to you. Now let us discuss your future. What can you do ? An idle life is always a miserable one, and you have to live down your trouble, not to let it crush you."

"There is not much I can do, unless—unless," timidly, "it is with my violin. Mr. Sterling used to say I was a clever performer."

"I will judge for myself ; stay a moment," Fedora hurried away, to return presently with a beautiful instrument which Psyche handled so tenderly and reverently that Fedora smiled.

But she was not prepared for the beautiful weird strains the girl produced, and held her breath with delight.

All at once she saw the tears fill Psyche's beautiful eyes, the sweet lips grew tremulous, and then the violin fell from her nervous fingers, as flinging herself upon a couch in an abandonment of woe she cried,—

"Oh, my home ! my home ! Would to Heaven I had never left it !"

Fedora knelt beside her.

"Psyche, cry if it eases your pain—here on my breast. I, too, have suffered ; my heart has bled, my courage has failed me. Dear child, there is still one ray of brightness in your life—you are not bound irreversibly to him."

"Do you not love him ?" the girl asked, under her breath ; "he is your husband."

"Yes," dreamily, "but he killed my love. If ever he needs me, if ever I can help him I will do so through a sense of duty. Not love any more ; oh, never any more ! Tell me of your brothers and sisters, if you can."

"Not yet ; it is all too recent, and—and though I have left them they are still so dear to me. Forgive me, I will not be weak again ; I must remember the world is before me, and I have my bread to earn."

"You will not find that difficult with my influence to assist your genius, but you must be prepared to leave England to-morrow ; I am due at Paris the following day. Do you trust me well enough to go so far ?"

"If I did not trust you I should indeed be forlorn."

Before Psyche went she wrote a farewell letter home, in which she said,—

"I never now can forgive myself for the sorrow I have made you bear. If only I had been a good and dutiful daughter I should now be a happier woman. I reached town safely but at Finsbury Park I left the man who professed to love me, because in his temporary absence I learned he was not free to marry me or any other. I have been foolish, but not wicked, and I feel you cannot wish to see me any more, and so I am going away with a lady, and I will not disgrace you by bearing your name. I shall love and pray for you all so long as I live, and will try to order my conduct so that I may not further disgrace my ancient race."

The postmark told nothing, and many bitter tears were shed over the poor little missive.

Everybody was aware now that Psyche Tremayne had mysteriously disappeared, and vague unpleasant rumours were about, but no one dared question the Manor people, who, if possible, bore themselves more proudly than ever, with the exception of the almost broken-hearted mother, and she rarely went abroad now.

In sadness the summer ended ; heavily the autumn dragged by, and the dark winter days found the old house dull and dreary.

Jess never lifted her voice in song, and her light foot fell less lightly than of yore, whilst her eyes were full of brooding thought. Jerry, boy-like, bore the trouble more easily, but Bert had grown into a taciturn lad, and his heart was hot with anger against his favourite sister.

In Vienna a young artiste, calling herself Miss Maythorne, a *protégée* of Madame Allix, was winning golden laurels for herself. The appearance of the little figure and the violin on the orchestra was the signal for a burst of enthusiasm and men raved not only of her genius but her sad young beauty, wondering amongst them

selves what tragic story lay hidden in her past. She was so young to wear such a look—scarcely eighteen—lovely, gifted, courted ; what had she left to desire ?

CHAPTER VII.

"It was spring, and Naples was very gay ; all the lovely world was at its loveliest, and even the sad heart of Psyche was lifted somewhat from its sadness, and she faintly smiled at Fedora's quaint remarks upon the gay city and its lazy, dark-eyed populace. To-night she was to perform to a brilliant audience.

Fedora had chosen a wonderful duet for their opening piece. It had been composed by a young Englishman, whose first and last melody it was.

"The death song of the swan," Fedora called it, for she said, "he had but just concluded his work when he died. It was sad to be so near to fame and yet never to grasp it."

Now she was chatting on lighter subjects, and as she toyed with the bright hued flowers she had paused to gather, said,—

"I want you to look your very best to-night ; that is why I insisted upon this drive. You wanted just a touch of colour in your cheeks. You see that black browed Nerissa Ponginello is to sing, and she will try to outshine you—not that I think her a very formidable rival."

"Oh, Fedora, she is handsome ; and I had no idea you were spiteful."

"But I am, and I dislike Nerissa. I suppose she is good looking in a bold style, but—" and a shrug of her shoulders completed her sentence.

"I suggest that you should select my dress if it is of such vital importance."

"May I ? Well, then my choice falls upon the white lace and silk ; young girls never look so well as in white. You shall wear my pearls, they suit your style, and for a dash of colour we will have crimson rosebuds. I want these susceptible Neapolitans to see the kind of girl old England can turn out."

"They will forget to look at anyone but you so long as you are on the orchestra. Suzette says they call you 'The Fair One with the Golden Locks.'"

Fedora smiled di-dainfully.

"Admiration does not disturb me now. Oh yes, I know I have beauty, but it never brought me any good thing, and I have lived to despise it. Now let us drive home ; I am positively dying for need of the cup that cheers etcetera."

Night came and the house was packed ; Nerissa Ponginello in all the bravery of yellow satin had won for herself some praise, because in her own way she was beautiful, but her voice was strong rather than sweet, and the applause was principally given by the many admirers of her physical loveliness.

She was followed by Fedora, whose appearance created a perfect storm of welcome ; she in her turn was succeeded by the tenor, and then came the feature of the evening, the piano and violin duet.

A low murmur passed through the house as Psyche appeared ; this was her first appearance in Naples, and excitement had lent just that touch of colour to her cheeks that she needed to enhance her youthful loveliness.

As she bowed her acknowledgment of the greeting, a man leant forward, he was a typical Englishman, tall, broad-shouldered, muscular, fair, and as he looked his fine, frank face grew pale, and under his breath he muttered,

"Great Heaven ! Psyche ! Psyche ! my Psyche !" and he thought as those around turned to glance at him that they must hear the passionate throbbing of his heart.

He had found her ; his lost delight, his darling from the time they first met, until the day when he should yield up his breath. He knew all her sorrowful story—that is all her people could tell and he trusted her still, as the good trust the promises their bibles holds out to them.

If he could teach her love she should yet be his wife let the world say what it would ; and oh !

the joy of seeing her, the poor little wild-bird who had so narrowly escaped the snare spread for the unwary feet.

Save for the weird music filling the air the house was deathly silent, but he heard nothing of the lovely strains, because of the happy dream which wrapped him round.

The last note had sounded, quivering away faintly, sweetly, and as it died out there was just a single moment's pause—not a sound—then a deep, soft Italian voice from the stalls purred out "*Brrraava*," and then the whole place nearly rang with applause.

Psyche had never known anything like it; she felt that such a moment was worth years of casual life-time, and her cheeks grew pale as Fedora led her forward.

A perfect shower of bouquets fell at their feet; one man alone threw but a fragrant bunch of violets he had been wearing; something in the little forlorn offering brought the quick tears to the artiste's eyes; in England it was the time of violets, and oh! how many hours had she spent in the woods with that mad, merry group, searching for the blossom that betrayed its covert by its sweetness.

She fastened them in her gown, beside the crimson roses, and he who loved her, watching, took that act for a happy omen, as smiling through her tears Psyche retreated.

She had won the hearts of the gay people, she was so young, so dainty, so winsome, that the young men of Naples were at her feet, and she knew as she left the house that her success was assured.

It was so sultry that Fedora proposed they should walk home, and the girl willingly agreed, for the night was divine.

But she was hardly prepared for the surprise awaiting her; as they reached the street a man stepped forward saying very quietly "Psyche!"

She knew the voice, there was no need to lift her eyes to his face, and with a wild gesture she flung out her hands as though to ward him off, and would have flown, but that Fedora held her fast, feeling assured that this was the Kenneth of whom she had heard so much.

"Psyche! won't you give me a word of greeting; would you run from an old friend?"

"Oh I cannot know, Ken," cried the girl in bitter distress, "or you would not claim friendship with me; go away, leave me to the peace I was slowly finding. Why do you come to recall all the past—all that I have lost?"

"What you lost you may find again for the seeking, and I am quite cognisant of your story so far as your people know it. Ah! Psyche, you loved them better than you trusted them; they cherish no bitter thoughts of you," she burst into tears, and Fedora with that delicacy which was so marked a feature in her character, said quickly,

"Psyche, your friend will bring you home; I want to see Nerissa and she is just before us—you, sir, are countryman, and as such I hope you will accept our hospitality;" then she was gone, and under the starlit sky these two, who had suffered so much and so long, walked slowly on to the villa Fedora rented.

Psyche told all her pitiful story, merely hiding from Kenneth the name of her companion in flight; and not all his entreaties would make her divulge that, and after he had listened he said—

"There has been so much trouble at Redruff since you went away; my father is dead, and the Manor is not the merry home it used to be; Mrs. Tremayne has cruelly aged—"

"Oh don't! oh don't! it is I who have made them miserable—"

"That is so, and I want you to fully recognize that fact, so that you may return to them; they are waiting to receive you in all love and honesty."

"No, no! you don't how you deceive yourself; they never can forgive me for the part I played, they would refuse to receive me—"

"Try them; and do not you think that you have made atonement by your efforts to win a place and a name for yourself—"

"A false name; I dare not wear my own. Oh no, Kenneth, I will not listen, and you must keep my secret for the sake of the old times when we were happy."

Seeing it distressed her to dwell upon that past he desisted, and rather devoted himself to soothing her, so that it was an almost composed Psyche who joined Fedora later on, presenting Kenneth in due form.

"Madame Alix," the young man said gratefully, "I cannot find words in which to thank you for your lavish goodness to Psyche; if only for her sake you will let me feel you are my friend too, and together we will labour to bring her affairs to a happy issue."

The beautiful grey eyes were moist as she gave him her hand, answering in her straightforward fashion,

"I am sure we shall be good comrades; I like you already, and I am with you in the desire to restore Psyche to her friends, although I feel life will be dreary without her."

After this Kenneth was a constant visitor at the Villa Rossetti, and the more Fedora saw of his character the more she admired it, by every means in her power endeavouring to win Psyche to him.

He was as their shadow; when they left for Florence he accompanied them, and through all their journeys to and fro, he aided them in a thousand little ways, until the girl began to feel a sense of helplessness when he was away, to look for his coming, to regret his going; to grow shy when he directly addressed her, and to tremble if his hand by chance touched hers.

At first she would not acknowledge to herself that he was dearer to her than in the past, when he had pleaded so vainly with her; it seemed a sort of sin to her that she could love again after all the bitterness of shame and disappointment she had endured.

Fedora saw the struggle going on within her, and wisely forbore to comment upon it; but to Ken she said,

"I dare bid you hope now; you have only to conquer her foolish scruples (Psyche is morbidly sensitive) and she is yours. You can be masterful when you choose; make her feel that you will not accept no for her answer. She loves you, of that I am quite sure, and with all my heart I wish you that happiness your loyalty deserves."

Encouraged by those words he went to Psyche; it was now three months since their meeting at Naples, and they were staying for awhile at Paris before returning to Vienna; and he resolved to put his fate to the test before they travelled further.

Fedora had considerably left the *salon* for their sole use, and when he entered Psyche started up murmuring some incoherent speech which concluded with the word "Fedora."

"It is not Madame Alix I wish to see, but you Psyche; I want to put an end to this uncertainty which grows more painful day by day."

She sank on a couch her hands fast clasped and her breath coming quickly; she guessed what he had to say, and with all her heart she prayed she might answer for his happiness—it was for him she must think—not of herself who was all unworthy the gift he offered.

"Psyche, it seems years ago to me since I spoke to you of love, hoping that my suit would not be all unwelcome; on my disappointment and what followed I need not dwell, I only wish you to know that great as my love for you then was, it could not compare with what I now feel for you. I have learned of late to believe (Heaven help me if I have presumed too far) that you are not quite indifferent to me, so once again I ask 'Will you be my wife?'"

"Ken! you cannot mean it! You surely forgot that ill-natured people have been busy with my name, and indeed I gave them reason to misjudge me. A bad daughter does not make a good wife, and I was undutiful in the extreme—I am an alien to my people and my country."

"Be quiet," he commanded, with gentle firmness. "There is no one believes such evil of you as you fear; you people love and long for you; if you will not wear your own name, take mine; I am not afraid to trust its honour to you—but one thing only shall you tell me—do you love me?"

"Oh with all my heart! stop, Ken; I am not promised to you yet. You have not even asked

me the name of the man for whose sake I could reject you."

"When you are my wife you shall tell me that; until which time I will prove my faith in you by shutting my ears to any information you would give. I am afraid if I knew, I should make him pay dearly for his devilish act. Now; give me your hands—so!—no, you shall not draw back. You have confessed your love—seal it with a kiss—let me feel that this is my wife I hold now in my arms; darling! darling! the dream of my manhood is real."

She burst into tears.

"Oh, I have not deserved this of you; I thought so poorly of you once, but now I think I could be content to die having learned you love me still. Ken, teach me to be worthy of you, and Heaven grant you never may regret your generosity—and—and this hour."

"You will not go to Vienna; in three weeks you will return to England and Redruff," Ken said, a little later, "and you will return as my wife. I am going to prepare a pretty surprise for my new relatives."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE three weeks sped quickly, and Kenneth had succeeded in overcoming his little sweetheart's scruples, although indeed her wonder that he should still love her made her so humble that he was pained at times. Still as Fedora said,—

"It was but recently that she had been in the very depths of despair; leave her to herself a little while and she will recover tone. Your love is good for her to have, but she still cannot believe that there is a welcome waiting her at home. When she has discovered how deep is the affection with which her people still regard her she will be the Psyche you used to know," and so Kenneth was content to wait.

They were very quietly married at the English church and, afterwards they sat down to breakfast, just the trio.

No guest had been invited; and it was while they lingered at table that a letter was brought to Fedora marked "immediate."

She tore it open, glancing down the crooked lines, and her face grew white as death; she sat staring before her with wide, troubled eyes.

Leaning forward Psyche touched her gently.

"Fedora, if it is trouble let me share it," and to her dismay the other broke into tears.

Presently however she recovered her composure sufficiently to say,—

"Mr. Sterling, this letter in a measure concerns Psyche; she is your wife and there must be no secret between you; only for my sake have mercy and not justice. Read this communication from Lord Boyne, you will then understand much that has seemed dark to you," and as he took the paper from her, he felt Psyche trembling against him; scarcely knowing what he feared, he read—

"MADAM.

With infinite difficulty I have succeeded in discovering your name and present address, and I can but acknowledge that I misjudged you, when years ago I told you, you were unworthy to bear my nephew's name. You conferred a greater honour upon him when you became his wife than Fabian Evremond deserved, for I hear nothing but good reports of you—"

(Gracious Heavens, are you Fabian's wife? Then why does he not acknowledge you?)

"Finish your reading before you pass any comments," said Fedora, in a low voice. "You will find much to astonish you;" and he continued,—

"Of course I do not consider class distinctions should be disregarded under any circumstances, but I am not blind to your merits, consequently I am more merciful to him than he deserves. It appears that some months ago one of the Cromeshire Tremaynes disappeared mysteriously from her home, and Mr. Tremayne, by means best known to himself, continued all along to

employ the services of an able detective, with the result that a fortnight since he discovered Fabian Evremond had lured her away, but that she had been saved from his designs by a certain Madame Allix. When taxed with the crime he made no denial, and I at once gave an account of his previous escapade to Tremayne. At the same time I disinherited him. Madame, that night he shot himself in despair and now lies in a precarious condition at his chambers. If you feel it your duty to join him, I have nothing to urge against such a plan. All the world may know now that you are his wife. But I cannot tell you that he wishes for your presence; if ever he loved honestly, he loved Miss Tremayne. Should you see fit to join him, please write me to that effect, and I will make all necessary settlements on your behalf. Awaiting your reply,

"I am, Madame,
"Yours, BOYNE."

"P.S.—I ought to tell you that if Fabian Evremond lives he will be crippled and an invalid all his life."

"Psyche!" said Kenneth. "Was it Fabian? My own friend?"

"Oh, Ken! Ken! don't say you love me less; I would never have told you, I was afraid of the vengeance you would take."

"He will take none now; his friend—my husband is defenceless," so spoke Fedora as she rose. "Kenneth is too generous to strike a fallen foe. As for me—as for me—I must go to him; that is clearly my duty. Would to Heaven I could say *love* takes me to him. No, Kenneth, not one word to stay me—now that he needs me I can forgive."

"You are a great and noble woman; I hope I shall soon say a happy one."

"Happiness and I parted long ago," with a sad smile, "but content may yet be mine; and because I have suffered much—if only because I love Psyche, you will try to forgive him, for he wronged you in less measure!"

But Kenneth could not promise so much when the knowledge of his friend's perfidy was yet so new; only he insisted that Fedora should not travel to England alone.

But for her Psyche long ago might have found a resting place in the river. So the newly-wedded pair travelled with her, reaching London too late to go to Fabian's chambers. In the morning Fedora sought him early; he was lying white, but conscious upon his pillows, and as he turned his weary head he murmured (hearing the swish of woman's garments):

"Psyche!"

The wife's heart beat fast and painfully, but she answered, steadily,—

"It is not Psyche, but Fedora, your wife; and I have come back to be your nurse—your help in the future—your companion if you will let me, Fabian."

He hid his eyes from her, and a groan burst from his pallid lips; such generosity was surely not for him. He had sinned against her beyond forgiveness, and yet she forgave him.

He was worn and wasted, long months of despair, of fruitless searching for Psyche had brought him very low; he was beggarly and an outcast, yet this beautiful woman clung to him through the wreck of his fortunes.

"Fedora! Oh, Heaven! Your goodness kills me."

And then, she, seeing him weak as a little child stooped to kiss the lips which had spoken so falsely to her in the past.

"Do not talk any longer; I am going to stay with you until you send me away. You have ample time before you for conversation."

Later in the day Lord Boyne and his solicitor arrived, but when the former spoke of an annuity he wished to settle upon the Evremonds, Fedora flushing, said,—

"In my husband's name and my own I must decline your generous offer. I am no longer a poor woman and it is my duty to provide for Fabian."

Her *duty!* alas, that she could never any more say *love*. She was kind and piteous always, and he never reaped the just reward of his sin, but her heart had gone from him, and though

through all his ailing life he was grateful to her, with a gratitude bordering on worship, he never returned to his old love.

He lived to conquer his unholy passion for Psyche; but, perhaps, the very fact that Fedora knew him just as he was, made it impossible for him to return to his allegiance.

Then, too, he had lost Kenneth, his best friend; and so he gradually sank into a confirmed invalid, dependent upon Fedora for every little necessary or luxury.

Had she been less noble she must have triumphed in that thought.

DEAR MR. TREMAYNE,—

"I am returning to Redruff to-morrow night, bringing my bride with me, and I ask you to crown your many kindnesses by giving us a welcome to The Red House. I have sent on instructions to Buttress to have all in readiness for you—and I won't have one of the youngsters omitted. Of course, Shelford is included in this very informal invitation" (Shelford was the accepted suitor of Jess, and, in the first instance, had won her heart by his championship of Psyche's cause.)

"I am quite certain you will not refuse when I tell you my wife knows you as my dearest friends, and is dreadfully nervous as to her reception.

"Dinner will be served at nine; we are not due until eight-thirty.

"May I further encroach upon Mrs. Tremayne's proverbial kindness, and ask her just this once to do the honours of the table for my dear wife?

"Taking everything as 'granted,' believe me, dear Mr. Tremayne,

"Yours most sincerely,
"KENNETH STERLING."

Mrs. Tremayne looked up with quivering lips.

"Oh, Gustavus, must we go? Once we hoped Psyche would reign at The Red House. Oh, my dear! my dear! where does my child find shelter to-day?"

"Hush, mother," said Jess, grown grave and gentle; "you must not so distress yourself and father. Heaven is good, and will take care of—of Psyche"—here she almost broke down—"and I think father will say we *ought* to go. Kenneth was always good to us, and, perhaps, it is better he has forgotten Psyche, since she could not love him; and, for his sake, we must be very kind to his wife"—which sentiments Mr. Tremayne drearily endorsed.

What a babble of voices in the hall! It almost seemed as though some one were sobbing.

Mrs. Tremayne stood still to listen. She could not go out to meet the girl who was now to Kenneth what her lost darling might have been; so she had remained in the drawing-room.

How the boys cheered! Even Bert's voice had lost its sullen ring, and Jess—forgetful of her sister—was laughing with the gayest.

The poor mother covered her eyes with her hands, moaning,—

"My dear one! my dear one! they are happy, but I can be happy no more until I fold you in my arms; I still must long for my lost lamb—"

The door opened, and the poor lady sat erect. Jess, with radiant face and starbright eyes, was saying,—

"Mother! she has come!—and—and—oh, Ken, why don't you bring her in?"

In the lighted hall stood Ken, but his bride was not visible.

"Love her for her own sweet sake," he said.

Then, putting out his hand, he drew forward a timid, shrinking, girlish figure, clad wholly in white.

As Mrs. Tremayne looked at her, her brain seemed to reel. The face was Psyche's! The beautiful, tender eyes meeting hers so timidously were Psyche's, too.

A great sob of thanksgiving rose to her lips, as, stretching out her arms, she received her lost child into her embrace, and felt her kisses warm upon her cheek.

[THE END.]

SWEET PEAS.

—:-

"I'll take them," said Mary Middleton, promptly.

She stood by the snowily-scoured table in the little sunbright kitchen, and swung her pink sun-bonnet by the strings.

"I think you must, dear," consented her mother, a gentle, careworn little woman. "I was afraid when Willie was so restless in the night that he was on the verge of illness, and now he is really sick—quite sick."

"I can deliver the baskets, of course," declared Mary, with decision. "Next time Will may take them as usual—for he is never long sick, you know. Now I'll run and do my hair."

"How the child brightens one up!" murmured her mother, with a smile, as she went on packing the two long willow baskets that stood on the kitchen table.

One she lined with large, fresh cabbage-leaves, and that she filled with pungent, curly, dark-green pepper-grass. The bottom and sides of the other she deftly covered with twigs from the lilac bush, and that she heaped with long-stemmed sweet peas, which looked like a swarm of brilliant butterflies—pink, purple, azure, rose and pearl. Over the contents of both baskets she sprayed water and tied a damp paper cover down over each.

"I don't know what we'd do without our garden, mother," said Mary, gaily, as she came back.

She had brushed her long dark hair, and plaited it in two heavy braids, tied on a white apron over her trim gingham gown, and put on a demure straw hat in place of her usual pink sunbonnet.

"Nor I, dear. When your father died five years ago and left me with you, a child of ten, and Willie, a sickly lad of seven, I hardly knew where to turn or what to do. But I had always been successful with plants, I decided to buy this little place with the few pounds left me, and try raising flowers and vegetables for sale. To a certain extent I have been successful, but it has been hard and tedious work."

Mary's bright face grew grave for a moment. It was a delicate, pretty face, with deep blue eyes, a milk-white complexion and thin, scarlet lips.

"Well, I'll be done with school next summer, mamma, and then I can help you ever so much! Now, which of these is for Martin's and which for Lister's?"

Her mother tied a string around the handle of one of the baskets.

"The sweet peas for Mrs. Martin are in this. You won't forget, Mary—the flowers in the basket with the string on the handle. And the pepper-grass for Mrs. Lister, who keeps the fine boarding-house in the other."

"I'll remember. I don't wonder they are willing to pay well for the things you sell. They are always the best of their kind, and you put them up so daintily!"

She hastened into the sitting-room to say an encouraging word to poor, feverish Willie, kissed her mother, took up the baskets—one in each cotton-gloved hand—and started off.

It was a balmy, blue-skied, odorous summer morning. The dew was not yet dried on the wayside grass. Meadow-larks and robins sang in the hedges, and Mary enjoyed her walk in from the little cottage in the suburbs to the big, bustling, prosperous town of —

She easily found the tree-embowered home of Mrs. Martin, who was an invalid, and one of her mother's best customers for flowers. Three times a week Willie had been accustomed to bring them in to her.

On the doorstep she hesitated.

"Let me see—what was it mother said? Oh, yes, I remember now! The pepper-grass in the basket with the string on the handle, and the flowers in the other. 'Good morning!' as the servant opened the door. 'Will was not well, so I brought in the sweet peas.'

"I'm glad of that," said the girl, "as Mrs. Martin was asking for them a minute ago. Here's the basket that was left the last time."

Ten minutes later Mary Middleton stood on the high brown stone steps of Mrs. Lister's fashionable boarding-house. She was about to ring when the door opened.

An old gentleman, erect, dignified, silver-haired, most carefully attired, confronted her. He was apparently about to take a morning walk.

"Ah, little girl!" he said. "What have you got there?"

"Pepper-grass, sir!" she replied.

"Pepper-grass!" he repeated, his aristocratic old nose sniffing delicately. "I've an acute—an extraordinarily acute—sense of smell, and if I'm not mistaken, you've a flower in that basket that used to grow in my mother's garden."

He was evidently an old gentleman who was used to being deferred to. He took the basket from her in quite an authoritative fashion. He undid the string and removed the cover. Then he gave a chuckle of satisfaction.

"Ah! Just as I thought! Sweet peas—sweet peas!"

"Oh, goodness gracious!" exclaimed Mary.

The old gentleman had seated himself on the settle, and was lifting the blossoms from their nest of lilac leaves with his yellow, taper old fingers.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"I've made a mistake, and left the pepper-grass at Mrs. Martin's, where I should have delivered the sweet peas!"

"Well, you'll have to take her some more, because I'm going to keep these. And what's more, I want a bunch every day while they last. Then bring me anything else you've got that's sweet-smelling and old-fashioned."

So Mary went back to Mrs. Martin's, explained her error, and promised to bring in fresh flowers that very day.

When she reached home her mother met her with a white, frightened face.

"Will?" questioned Mary, in a whisper.

"Oh, Mary, it's brain fever!"

After that, the need that the fruit and vegetables contracted for should be delivered in proper condition and with regularity was more imperative than ever.

And the care of this fell on Mary. She did her best, with the inefficient help she could secure, but she had neither her mother's skill nor experience, and before long the little garden betrayed neglect. The sales fell off. Finally there came a day when the needs outstripped the shillings, and mother and daughter looked at each other with eyes full of dumb dread.

"Write to grandpapa. He will help us. He is rich, you say."

"Dear, my marriage displeased him. I frequently tried to meet him afterward; he refused to see me. I wrote; my letters were returned unopened. I do not know if he is living or dead. We need money; we can neither earn nor beg it; we must sell our little home."

That evening a neighbour conditionally consented to buy the property, and the next morning Mary took in a cluster of mignonette and verbena to Mrs. Lister's eccentric old lodger.

"I think these are the last I can bring, sir," she said, when he had paid, as he always did, generously.

"Why, what are you crying for?" he asked, sharply.

Then she told him.

"Look here, Mary—that's your name, isn't it?—I'll go out myself and see the place where you grow things so good to smell; some so good to eat. If I like it I'll lend your mother twenty pounds, and take it out in flowers. That would tide you over your hard times, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, yes sir, yes! Less than that."

She had heard a great deal of the peculiar ways and immense wealth of "old Mr. Morgan," as Mrs. Lister's star boarder was called, but she had not expected such an offer as this.

She half doubted that he would keep his word, but he did.

He appeared at sunset in the little flower-garden, before the small gray cottage.

Mary, laughing and crying, met him at the door.

"The doctor says," she cried, "that Willie will get better!"

But old Mr. Morgan was not looking at her. He was staring beyond her at a spare little woman with a sweet, careworn face.

A queer, choking cry broke from his lips. He took a step forward.

"Mary—my daughter Mary!"

"Father!"

She was sobbing all her sorrowful heart out in his arms.

"Why did you never come to see me?" he asked, half an hour later, as they sat together by the little vine-embowered window. "You never even wrote. I was willing to forgive you. My heart ached for you."

"Aunt Barbara said you would not see me. I called several times. My letters to you were returned unread."

"Mary, is this true? We must not speak ill of the dead—and she is gone. But I can see now that she tried to alienate us in order that I should leave my property to her children. A year ago I sold out and came here. I'll buy a beautiful place that is vacant not far from here. It is called Westvale. As soon as the laddie can be moved we will go there to live. No more poverty, Mary. Little Mary," turning fondly to her, "why did you not tell me your name in full?"

"'Nobody asked me, sir!'" she quoted, archly.

They are at Westvale now. Mrs. Middleton is getting the roses of her girlhood back. Willie is still a little dazed by the luxury of his surroundings. And often when Mary brings her grandfather a bouquet of fresh, fragrant, old-fashioned flowers, she thinks, with a happy heart, of the day that she delivered to Mrs. Martin pepper-grass instead of sweet peas.

FACETLÆ.

MRS. NAGGS: "Words cannot express my contempt for you." Naggs: "I'm glad to hear it. Now I will have a little peace."

ANXIOUS FAIR ONE: "Are you engaged to Dorothy Bronson?" "Weally, I don't know. Ask her."

SHE: "Will you see papa to-morrow?" He: "Y-es, if you will give me a letter of introduction. He never knows me when he sees me."

MISS CHARITY: "Is your husband addicted to the use of alcoholic stimulants?" Recipient of Alms: "No, indead, mum, not he. His only failin' is drinkin'."

MRS. PLUMBLEIGH (before her mirror): "Who said I hadn't a good figure?" Mr. P.: "I didn't, I'm sure; but the glass seems to be casting a reflection."

"HANDSOMELY GOWNED" is the newest affliction of feminine journalism. How would "beautifully trousered," or "admirably inexpressible" do for the men?

SHE: "But you have no reason to be jealous of me; you know you haven't." He: "Reason! Reason! I dispensed with my reason entirely when I fell in love with you."

THE UNMARRIED ONE: "Jack is not rich; but then one in moderate circumstances can be happy. Don't you think so?" The married one: "Yes, but not two, dear."

MAUD: "The beach is all littered with seaweed to-night." Jack: "That is strange, isn't it? The ocean has such a reputation for being tidy."

THE CITY EDITOR: "What have you written about the death of that bright young Jenkins?" The Irish Reporter: "Something nate, sir, windin' up with these words: 'He leaves a brilliant future behind him.'"

CHOLLY: "Mabel and—er—I have been—er—talking—and—I—have come to ask if you will consent to our marriage?" Her father: "What! Allow you to marry my daughter Mabel? Never!" Cholly (with a sigh of relief): "Thanks, awfully."

HIS: "Now, what would you really think of a girl who treated a fellow as you have treated me?" She (apologetically): "I wouldn't think of her at all. I'd forget her."

LADY (to sea-captain): "How do you manage to find your way across the ocean?" Captain: "By the compass. The needle always points to north." "But suppose you go south?"

YOUNG WIFE: "Now, sir, I've given you half my picnic pies, and you promised to work for them." Tramp: "Bless your sweet eyes, mum, I did—as I wuz eatin' of 'em."

KATHLEEN: "She's n.o.t unfortunately married. What has she in common with her husband?" Norah: "According to the new styles, they can use the same collars and necktie, and possibly the same vest."

DO YOU KNOW MR. S.? "Not very intimated." "He gains a good deal by being known." "How is that?" "As soon as he makes a new acquaintance, he borrows money of him and never returns it!"

FOREMAN: "Here are two editorials, one pitching into the Czar for expelling the Hebrews, and the other pitching into Cleveland for not expelling the Chinese." Great Editor: "Hum! Hold one of 'em over till to-morrow."

A RECRUIT, who was going through the sword exercise, after having learnt all the cuts, asked how he had to parry the cuts of the enemy. An old Hussar answered: "Never mind the parrying; only you cut, and let the other parry."

HICKS (to Briggs, who has had a day out at target practice): "Did you hit the bull's eye, old man?" Briggs: "No! it was a cow, I believe. At any rate, it cost me £20 to fix it up with the fellow who owned the creature."

SHE was very much embarrassed, as the rivals had both called the same night; but at last a bright thought entered her mind. "Oh, Mr. Brown," she said to one of them, who was musically inclined, "do play that lovely waltz of yours, and Mr. Spooner and I will dance."

"ETHEL," said the teacher, "who do the ancients say supported the world on his shoulders?" "Atlas, sir." "You're quite right," said the teacher. "Atlas supported the world. Now, who supported Atlas?" "I suppose," said Ethel, softly, "I suppose he married a rich wife."

DASHAWAY—"You say your sister will be down in a minute, Willie. That's good news. I thought, perhaps, that she wanted to be excused, as she did the other day." "Not this time. I played a trick on her." "What did you do?" "I said you were another fellow," exclaimed Willie, triumphantly.

MRS. STRONGMIND (about to start with the picnic party): "Let me see—here are the wraps, here's the lunch-basket, here's the opera-glass, and here's the bundle of umbrellas. I think we've got everything, and yet—children, we haven't forgotten anything, have we?" Husband and Father (standing merrily at the horses' heads): "Shall I get in now, my dear?" Mrs. Strongmind: "Why, to be sure, James, I knew there was something else!"

ANGRY VISITOR: "I have a good mind to horsewhip you, sir. What induced you to head the notice of my wedding as 'A Fatal Mistake?'" Editor: "Pray be calm, sir. It was merely a little mistake of the compositor's. That heading should have been placed over an account of a railway accident. We expect every moment to hear that the railway company are going to sue us for libel, for calling the accident 'A Very Enjoyable Affair.'"

A GENTLEMAN, wishing some bushes removed from his garden, told his gardener to pull them up by the roots. Some time after, he went up into the garden, and found the gardener digging trenches around the bushes: "Why, George, he said, "you need not dig around those small bushes in that way. I am sure you are strong enough to pull them up by the roots." "Oh, yes, sir," replied the gardener, "I'm strong enough, but I must dig a little before I can get hold of the roots. If you had told me to pull them up by the branches, I could easily have removed them without digging."

SOCIETY.

THE Queen signs herself to her sons and daughters-in-law "Always your affectionate mother, V. R. I."

THE Duke of Edinburgh's London residence, Clarence House, is being painted a pale green.

THE Shah, it might hardly be credited, keeps a diary, like a good many other potentates.

THE Queen cares nothing for the pleasures of the table (contrary to the popular idea), and likes the most simple food.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS FREDERICK CHARLES OF Hesse are expected to come to England on a visit to the Queen at Balmoral.

THE Infanta Eulalia and her little ones have been invited by the Queen to Balmoral on the return of Princess Eulalia to England.

THE latest-born son of the Crown Prince and Princess of Greece makes the number of Queen's great-grandchildren sixteen. He is the eleventh grandchild of the Empress Frederick.

It is possible that the Empress Frederick may come to England towards the end of October, on a brief visit to the Queen at Balmoral, before she proceeds to Rome for the winter.

THE Queen, it has been stated, will visit Germany next springtide, and probably go to several of the places where she went on her first visit to the Continent after her marriage.

THE Grand Duke of Hesse will stay for a month at Bad Nauheim. He will be accompanied by his sisters, Princess Henry of Prussia and Princess Alix of Hesse.

THE domestic arrangements at Buckingham Palace are not all that could be desired. Great corridors, leading to nowhere in particular, occupy much of the space, the rooms are inconveniently remote from one another, and in order, presumably, to prevent the smell of the cooking obtruding on Royal noses, the kitchen is actually a quarter of a mile from the Queen's private dining-room.

THE new Empress Augusta Bath for Women, which has been built at Baden-Baden as a memorial of her late Majesty, was opened recently in presence of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Baden and the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Saxe-Weimar. This bath, which is built in the Italian Renaissance style, and fitted with every modern improvement, has cost nearly £50,000.

THE Grand Duke George's physicians have ordered him to spend next winter in Algiers, where he will not have the sudden changes of temperature which he feels in the Trans-Caucasian district, where His Imperial Highness is at present. If the Emperor approve of this, the Grand Duke will go to Algiers by sea all the way, passing by Constantinople, stopping for a day or two at Athens to pay a visit to the King of the Hellenes.

THE private chapel at Windsor Castle in which the Queen's pew will in future be on the floor level, is an interesting little structure adjoining her Majesty's private apartments, and one of the most curious details is a cleverly carved group of cherubs, representing the grandchildren whom her Majesty has lost by death. On the walls also are memorial medallion portraits, very cleverly executed, of General Grey, Sir Thomas Biddulph, Dean Wellesley of Windsor, and Dean Stanley of Westminster, all, in their day, tried and trusted friends of their Sovereign.

THE carriages of the Empress of Austria, and of many other royal and imperial personages in Europe, are provided with a queer kind of automatic mechanism of the seat and back cushion, which forces the occupant, by means of geared connection with the axles to bow incessantly, without any exertion, while the carriage is in motion. While the contrivance, which resembles the sliding seat of a racing shell, is exceedingly ingenious, and, as a rule, saves much fatigue, yet, on the other hand, it is not without its disadvantages, since it obliges the royal or imperial personages to continue bowing, even when there is no one to respond.

STATISTICS.

MORE accidental deaths occur every year in this country from drowning than from any other cause.

THE average expenditure for gas is 21s. per inhabitant per annum in London, and 10s. in other towns. A ton of coal gives 9,000 cubic feet of gas.

A row of gun-cotton reaching from Edinburgh to London, it is said, could be fired in two minutes, so rapid is the transmission of detonation from one part to another.

THE marriage rate of Germany rose 10 per cent. in the year following the Franco Prussian war. The same phenomenon was observed after the French war which ended in 1815.

A good railway-engine will travel about 1,000,000 miles before it wears out. However, the life of an engine depends as to its length upon the treatment it receives. With ordinary service it ought to last twelve years.

GEMS.

THERE is a great deal of unmapped country within us which would have to be taken into account in explanation of our gusts and storms.

THE mind contemplates genius through the shades of age as the eye surveys the sun through artificial opacity.

As small letters hurt the sight, so do small matters him that is too much intent upon them; they stir up anger, which begets an evil habit in him in reference to greater affairs.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

APPLE TOAST.—Toast thin slices of bread carefully, butter generously and lay in a dish. Pour over them stewed apples; cover and set for a few minutes in a moderate oven. Serve hot with cream.

FROZEN APRICOTS.—Take one can of apricots, a pint of sugar, a pint of whipped cream and one quart of water; cut the apricots in small pieces and add the sugar and water, and freeze; add whipped cream when the mixture is half frozen. These quantities will make a gallon when frozen.

CROQUETTES OF FISH.—Separate any kind of cooked fish from the bones, mince fine, season with pepper and salt to taste, beat one egg with a teaspoonful of flour and a little milk. Mix this with the fish and make into balls. Brush the outside with eggs, dredge with flour. Fry nicely in hot lard, being careful to get a nice even brown on them.

FISH SAUCE ON TOAST FOR LUNCH.—Shred finely some white codfish, put it in cold water on the back of the stove to freshen while you make a sauce. Thicken nearly a pint of milk with flour, add a hard-boiled egg chopped fine, and the fish after draining thoroughly. Make a nice toast, well buttered, and pour the fish sauce over it. Serve hot, garnished with slices of the hard-boiled egg.

MINCED MUTTON.—This is a favourite mode of disposing of cold mutton, especially if it should happen to be underdone. Cut it into very small pieces and mince, take the bones and put them in a stew pan with the trimmings; cover them with water, put in a faggot of thyme, parsley, whole pepper, and allspice; cover down and simmer for three quarters of an hour. While the bones are stewing, fry an onion brown in a little butter and flour; put in the stew pan with the gravy, stew gently twenty minutes, strain it, lay the mutton in the stewpan, pour over it the strained gravy; pour in a dessert spoonful of walnut ketchup, or any preferred sauce, simmer until the meat is hot through, dish and serve

MISCELLANEOUS.

GERMANY has an aerial navigation society.

MAHOMET'S tomb is covered with diamonds, sapphires, rubies and precious stones.

NEW ZEALAND has set apart two islands for the preservation of its remarkable wild birds and other animals.

It is said that the orange was originally a berry of the size of the ordinary wild cherry. Its evolution in size and sweetness is the result of 1,500 years of attention by horticulturists.

A TRAVELLER in the Malay peninsula says that the natives have in use there the smallest coin in the world. It is a wafer made from resinous juice of a tree, and its value is estimated to be 1-10,000 of a penny.

A CURIOUS coin used by the Gauls, about 2,000 years ago, was shaped like a horseshoe or the capital letter U, and was about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick and 2 inches across. Specimens of this coin have recently been found in Ireland.

AMONG many Indian tribes it is in the highest degree improper for a mother-in-law to speak to her daughter's husband. If she finds it necessary to communicate with him, it is etiquette that she should turn her back, and address him through the medium of a third person.

A HINDOO baby is named when it is twelve days old, and usually by the mother. Sometimes the father wishes for another name than that selected by the mother. In that case two lamps are placed over the two names, and the name over which the lamp burns the brightest is the one given the child.

AN iron Eagle exhibited by the Japanese at Chicago weighs over one hundred and thirty pounds and required five years' labour. The skilful maker caught two eagles, one of which he killed and stuffed, and used both as models. There are three thousand feathers all of remarkable fineness.

THE four countries in the world which possess the smallest telegraphic facilities are Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay and Persia. In Paraguay only five hundred and ten miles of wire are in operation, requiring the services of but twenty-eight persons. Peru has thirty-six offices and sixteen hundred miles of wire.

THE Spaniard, however courteous he may be, never invites a guest to dinner. In Italy, too, the privacy of the family is seldom invaded at the dinner hour. The Frenchman is delighted to entertain, but prefers to do it at his club; while the Englishman is never so genial as when seated at his own table with company surrounding him.

THE Irish peasantry have a general impression that marriage without a gold ring is illegal. This is very probably because fictitious rings of rushes were once used in England to delude girls into a mock marriage, as a ring is absolutely necessary in a Church of England marriage; but the Bishop of Salisbury put a stop to the sport by declaring the rush ring contract legal.

AMONG the superstitions of the Seneca Indians is the following: When a maiden dies, they imprison a young bird until it first begins to try its power of song; and then loading it with kisses and caresses, they set it at liberty over the maiden's grave, in the belief that it will not fold its wings nor close its eyes until it has flown to the spirit land, and delivered its precious burden of affection to the loved and lost. It is not uncommon for twenty or thirty birds to be loosed over the same grave.

CERTAINLY the most cosmopolitan army in Europe, at any rate as regards its officers, must be that of the Sultan. The torpedo fleet of the Gendarmerie is commanded by two Englishmen, Wood Pasha and Blunt Pasha. Baron Von der Goltz is Inspector of Military Schools, the Engineers are commanded by Blum Pasha, and Baron Von Riston—yet another German—is Inspector of Military Staff. Lecocq Pasha, a Frenchman, is Professor of Technical Science in the Army, and the Cavalry is under the command of Baron Von Hobo Pasha, who is now in England for the purpose of buying cavalry horses.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MOPS.—Unable to oblige you.

TORY.—No, it should not be done without special permission.

MAGNANIMOUS.—The Duke of York is also Earl of Inverness and Baron Killarney.

CONTRALTO.—We should say you would get better tuition in Italy than in Germany.

PARSIMONIOUS.—There is nothing illegal in giving over-weight or over-measure to a customer.

N. N.—You shouldn't try Turkish baths without first consulting a doctor.

FORGOTFUL.—The marriage of Princess Louise of Wales to the Duke of Fife took place on July 27, 1889.

MINER.—The Davy safety lamp for miners was invented by Sir Humphrey Davy in 1815.

DANDY.—We could not possibly advise you what would be the best thing to do under the circumstances.

E. D.—In 1831 the invention of milling the edges of coins, to prevent clipping, was introduced.

A. B. C.—The buyer is certainly entitled to rent from the time he purchased the property, unless anything to the contrary was agreed upon at the time of purchase.

MAYBLOSSOM.—Put soft paper between the folds, and they will have creased very little when you reach your journey's end.

TENANT.—You are liable to the same notice from your new landlord as you would have been from your old one.

RAGS.—Rub them with beeswax, and they will not slip or untie. Wax the ends, too, when the tin points are off.

ANCIENT.—Egyptian temples were usually approached by an avenue guarded by a row of sphinxes on each side.

S. S. T.—Soot, applied to a fresh cut or wound, will stop the flow of blood, and abate the pain at the same time.

JUGURETA.—A sovereign contains a very slight amount of alloy in order to make it sufficiently hard for circulation; pure gold would be too soft.

TAN.—Banana skins may be cleaned with a piece of ripe banana. This should be well rubbed in, and the shoes then polished with a flannel cloth.

SU.—Ink spots can frequently be taken from white clothes by rubbing on common tallow, leaving it for a day or two, and then washing as usual.

INDIGNANT COUNTRYMAN.—The Admiralty intend, if possible, to increase the facilities for all who enter the naval service to learn swimming.

DISAGREEMENT.—All the substances necessary to human life are contained in milk and the yolk of eggs. A man can live in health on these two foods.

CHRISTINE.—There is no law of etiquette on the point you mention, it being simply a matter for the person interested to decide. We should say your second suggestion would be more appropriate.

IGNORAMUS.—*Vis inertiae* means the power of inertia; resistance; in physics, that property of matter by which it tends when at rest to remain so, and when in motion to continue in motion.

CURIOS.—Lightning is zigzag because, as it condenses the air in the immediate advance of its path it flies from side to side in order to pass where there is the least resistance to its progress.

ANXIOUS READER.—No doubt if you stated your difficulty to the person concerned, the matter could be arranged as you wish. A mutual understanding on the point would be the most satisfactory way of settling the question.

POOR WOMAN.—When premises require disinfection the authorities may call upon either the owner or occupier to do the necessary work; but if the owner and occupier are too poor, then the authorities may perform the disinfection at the public cost.

DAINTY GRACE.—Kid shoes may be kept soft by rubbing them over once a week with pure glycerine and castor oil; and the leather of shoes and boots can be softened if washed monthly in soft warm water and then oiled thoroughly.

B. S.—Australian colonies governed by their own elected Parliaments, presided over by a representative of the Imperial Government—a governor who has a power of veto upon measures passed by the Parliament similar to the royal prerogative or veto at home.

GRANDDAD.—If the children are illegitimate, you, as their grandfather, cannot be made to alight them; nor will decree be given against you on their account even if they are legitimate, provided you prove that your means will barely suffice for your own maintenance.

BRIDESNAID.—In some cases the group of bridesmaids follow the bride to the church door in the order in which they entered; in others, they walk down the nave with the best man and the bridegroom's supporters.

DISTRACTED EMILY.—A criminal is not permitted to conduct his own defence in a court of law, the judge may as a favour let him make a statement, and if he says he has no advocate, the judge at once directs one of those in Court to state defence.

NURSERY GOVERNESS.—In proportion to the amount that is paid for her education, there is no woman worker who is paid so poorly as the teacher, and there are no ranks that are so overcrowded as that of teaching. Here as everywhere the supply regulates the market.

A LOVER OF HISTORY.—A treaty of peace between Spain and Holland was signed shortly after the defeat of the Dutch in 1653, but the appointment, by the will of Charles, of Philip of Anjou, as sole heir to the Spanish monarchy, was resisted by Germany, England, and Holland, for thirteen years.

A CONSTANT SUFFERER.—The trouble or annoyance you describe may be either the result of indigestion or of sexual disorder; we must not attempt to prescribe a cure for it, because it is only to be reached by special medicines, if, as we think, the system is disordered, and we do not deal with medicines.

F. S.—In leaving money to an illegitimate child it is necessary to distinguish him by the name or names by which he has been habitually known, and to describe him as "my natural son; commonly known as" &c. Words such as "my sons" or "my children," would only include legitimate children.

JABEZ.—To know whether you have got pure amber, try to burn it, it will spit and froth, and the drops will rebound from where they fall. On the contrary, copal, which is often sold for amber, when held on the point of a knife, will catch fire, and run into drops, which fall flat.

LOVER OF "THE LONDON READER".—The word *décolleté* is pronounced as if spelled da-kol-le-ta, the accent on the last syllable. It is a French word, and signifies to bare the neck and shoulders; or cut low in the neck; low-necked, as a dress. We know of no other words in general use of similar significance.

THE OLD COUPLE.

GOING down Life's hill together,
This old man and his aged wife—
Through the storms and sunny weather,
Through the peace, the toll and strife.

Winsome girls and boys true-hearted—
Now to men and women grown—
From the home-nest have departed,
And these two are left alone.

Years have marked with stealthy fingers
Lines upon her cheeks and brow;
Still a charm about her lingers
For the husband even now.

He, once strong in manly beauty,
Old-time power no more can wield;
Yet she, in her love and duty,
Holds him still her staff and shield.

Youthful love grown sweeter, purer
Through the trials they have met,
Holds their hearts together surer—
Each one trusts and does not fret.

Without fear or timorous shiver
They await "the muffled ear"
That shall bear them o'er the river
To that strange and distant shore.

L. M. G.

VALENTINE.—There has been published what purports to be the text of a Scottish Act passed in 1228, under which any man who refused a proposal in Leap-Year was liable to a fine of £100 unless he could prove that he was already betrothed. There is some doubt, however, as to the authenticity of this extraordinary document.

INEXPERIENCED.—First use turpentine, and when you have removed as much of the grease as possible by applying it, then get thick, soft brown paper and a hot iron. Put the paper on the spots, and pass the hot iron over it. Remove the paper each time as it becomes saturated with oil, and substitute a fresh piece till all the grease disappears.

A COQUETTE.—The question of colour and complexion is not one of the greater or less beauty of the skin in the individual, but is simply that of avoiding the placing of trying hues against the face without the use of white. Many women ignore the fact that the colours worn are reflected in all but opaque skins, and, as a rule, the skin is much more often transparent than it is opaque.

J. H.—A good barometer can be made with a leech. Put one in a clear bottle and cover it with a linen rag; change the water in winter once a month, in summer once fortnight. If the weather is to be fine the leech lies motionless at the bottom; if it is to rain it comes to the top of the water. If a storm of wind is coming it goes round and round its habitation swiftly; if a storm of thunder and rain is coming, it lodges above the water and shows great uneasiness. In frost, as in fine weather, it lies close to the bottom.

HOPELESS.—Remember that every obstacle, however great, if overcome now, will enable you to overcome greater ones in the future. Apply yourself diligently to your tasks, and let no such word as fail enter your mind. As you have doubtless read more than once, "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." You may not possess the genius of many of your competitors, but if you have industry, persistence, and resolution, they will all help you to reach the goal in view in company with those who are now in advance of you.

ONE IN DOUBT.—There is such a thing as carrying etiquette to an extreme. Good or common sense should always be at the bottom of it. As regards standing while talking in the street, we concede there is too much of it done, and often to the inconvenience of other pedestrians, who sometimes have to go to the edge of the kerb to avoid coming in collision with the parties at fault.

FLORA.—Flowers may be kept fresh over night if they are excluded from the air. To manage this, do not set them in water, but thoroughly wet them and wrap them closely in dampened paper, then in dry, after which they should be placed in a pasteboard box, the lid shut down and set in a cool place—the colder the better. An ice box is the best, but in lieu of that, a good cellar.

MARGERY MAY.—The growth of ivy on the walls of houses renders the walls entirely free from damp, the ivy extracting every particle of moisture from wood, brick, or stones for its own sustenance, by means of its tiny roots, which work their way into the hardest stone. The overlapping leaves of the ivy conduct water falling upon them from point to point until it reaches the ground, without allowing the walls to receive any moisture whatever from the beating rain.

TASL.—Our advice to you is not to heed your lover's appeals. There may be cases where parents are unjustly prejudiced against the admirer of their daughter, but in your case, as you state it, you have no excuse to go contrary to their wishes. The hope that you may be able to reform your lover is too frail a thing to trust to. Wait until he gives proofs of his thorough reformation, and your parents, if you picture them aright, will in time give you to him with their blessing.

EXCELSIOR.—Little or no progress has been made in the gentle art of complexion making since the earliest times of Egyptian and Assyrian civilisation. The methods and the materials employed by the women of to-day appear to be practically the same as those used on the banks of the Euphrates and the Nile thirty or forty centuries ago, and, if anything, it would seem that the women of to-day might learn something from their sisters of the past.

AN AMATEUR.—While it is, of course, possible to learn the business without a teacher, it is a question whether it would pay to try to do so. Time and material are valuable, and much of both might be saved by employing a practical printer for a few months or until you were familiar with the various branches of the trade. Probably enough work might come in to pay the cost of an assistant, and at the same time you might be learning much that you would scarcely acquire by yourself.

DOX.—The following account is given of the origin of the term "eavesdropper." At the revival of Masonry in 1717, a curious punishment was inflicted upon a man who listened at the door of a Masonic meeting in order to hear its secrets. He was summarily sentenced "to be placed under the eaves of an outhouse while it was raining hard, till the water ran in under the collar of his coat and out at his shoes." The penalty was inflicted on the spot, and the name has continued ever since.

ALISON.—A certain remedy for the most inveterate stains that are sometimes seen on teaspoons and other silverware, is to pour a little sulphuric acid into a saucer, wet with it a soft linen rag, and rub it on the blackened silver until the stain disappears. Then coat the articles with whiting, finely powdered and sifted, and mixed with whisky or spirits of wine. When the whiting has dried on, and rested a quarter of an hour or more, wipe off with a silk handkerchief, and polish with a soft buckskin.

PERPLEXED ONE.—This is a difficult question to answer. It depends greatly on the circumstances, mainly the age of the widower and the age of the children. Some men would hesitate a long time before they would risk the care of their wife's children to another woman. If the children are young and the widower has no immediate relative, such as a sister, mother or aunt who could look after the children for him, his position is certainly a trying one. But, on the other hand, if he means simply to provide a mother for his children, we think he is taking a great risk, not only for his own happiness, but also that of his children. If, however, a man who is a widower has decided to marry again, he should be the best judge of the proper length of time. To one man a year would seem long enough; to another of a more sensitive and affectionate disposition, it would require many years before he could reconcile himself to the idea of putting another in his wife's place.

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